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ABSTRACT

This is the first report of a study of factors involved in sustainable school improvement in New Zealand. The study's purpose is to see whether there is a common understanding of "school improvement" in schools, and in the external agencies and organizations that support or frame their work. The report describes case studies in nine primary schools and one intermediate school that have made deliberate efforts in the last 3 to 5 years to bring about positive improvements in teaching and learning. It provides descriptive material about the case studies and the main features that supported or constrained them in their efforts to develop. Information was collected from interviews with 32 people, including principals, government officials, researchers, and teacher educators. Study results point to the need for schools to create conditions to support reflective practice, and the need for a strong role to be played by government in offering the kinds of resources, support, and professional development that enable schools to be effective and continually improving learning organizations. Appendices contain a description of what makes a good school, invitations to participate, consent forms, interview materials, interviews, and names and organizations of study participants. (Contains 23 references and 53 tables.) (RT)

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Sustaining school improvement:

Ten primary schools' journeys

Linda Mitchell, Marie Cameron, and Cathy Wylie

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SUSTAINING SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT – TEN PRIMARY SCHOOLS' JOURNEYS

Linda Mitchell, Marie Cameron,
and Cathy Wylie

New Zealand Council for Educational Research
Te Rūnanga o Aotearoa mō te Rangahau i te Mātauranga
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the first report of a study which seeks to expand our understanding of factors involved in sustainable school improvement in New Zealand and to see whether there is now a common understanding of "school improvement" in schools and the external agencies and organisations which support or frame their work. The report describes case studies in nine primary schools and one intermediate school which have made deliberate efforts in the last three to five years to bring about positive improvements in teaching and learning. The schools will be studied again in 2004, giving the opportunity to find out what is involved in improvement over time and its sustainability. This report provides descriptive material about the case study schools and the main features that supported or constrained them in their efforts to develop. Secondly, the report describes interviews with 32 experienced people involved in schools as practising primary principals, representatives of schools sector organisations, government officials, academics and researchers, and teacher educators. It highlights similarities and differences in perspective about their understanding of school improvement, and main themes and issues related to improvement.

Case Studies

The ten schools had different histories and different patterns of development that distinguished them. But there were common features about starting points and development paths that were used as a basis for grouping them. The starting points were:

- Culture of steady development—no clear starting point. These were stable schools, making positive changes in teaching and learning over time.
- Rapid roll growth schools. Two schools had rapid roll growth; one from 300 to 375 in 3 years, the other from 193 to 255 students.
- Crisis turn-around schools, where the school had moved from a point of crisis to positive development.

All schools had some features in common and took some similar and some different approaches.

In the *steady development* schools, a new platform was to raise teacher expectations of student achievement, and work to improve student achievement and behaviour. In two of the low decile schools, special efforts were made to engage parents, draw on parents' knowledge, and develop greater coherence between school and home, or early childhood centre and school. All schools developed links with community groups in order to strengthen resources for students and families.

The philosophies, climate, and programme of the *roll-growth* schools seemed to match the expectations and needs of the communities. Adjusting to roll growth brought challenges of recruiting new teachers and coping with staff changes. One school used organisational structure to create a family atmosphere, by organising the school as a campus with separate primary and intermediate schools and offering consistency through school-wide approaches to planning, assessment, and curriculum. The other had a strongly collaborative approach and shared leadership.

The crisis turn-around schools all had to deal with low morale, bring staff into a cohesive team, and improve poor public image and the social and physical environment. Principals made a thoughtful analysis of the problems and systematically addressed them. Each principal developed a constructive relationship with the board of trustees chair and trustees undertook training. The relationship with the board of trustees chair and development of clear management and governance roles provided support to the principal during this time, and were a useful link with parents. Each school created a positive climate, e.g., through improvements in buildings and playgrounds, achieving success in outside competitions, and gaining positive publicity.

Five common elements emerged in all schools:

- Staff shared and understood school goals, which had a primary focus on student learning.
- Teachers had high expectations about student achievement and behaviour. Some teachers' perceptions of children's capabilities and expectations of children were extended through professional development.
- Student feedback was used to help students gain insight into their own work, and to become reflective about their own work.
- There was a major focus on literacy and numeracy in all schools, with some schools integrating the curriculum and others cutting back in some areas. The flexibility to use achievement objectives selectively allowed schools to construct their own goals in response to analysis of students' need. Only one school described its efforts to systematically cover and have professional development in all essential learning areas, in response to Education Review Office (ERO) criticism. Some thought the mandated curriculum made unrealistic demands on teachers. Some schools offered extension programmes.
- There were varying approaches to assessment, with some schools struggling to use assessment tools and interpret data for student learning. Schools that were part of the Ministry of Education's (MOE) Literacy Enhancement Programme were positive about their learning from this programme of how to develop and moderate their own benchmarks, provide consistent shared standards across the whole school, and have a common base from which to analyse teaching and learning.

Information about student achievement levels over time was easiest for schools to provide where they developed school-wide exemplars or standards of expected achievement for different curriculum levels or units, or used standardised tests. Most schools tracked the achievement of students at different levels, and identified students who needed additional attention. Some schools focused their programme on identified need and checked to gauge whether progress had been made to meet expectations.

Some schools gave evidence of rises in student achievement levels over three or four years, but this was not constantly upwards, reflecting the natural variability of students, teacher expertise, and to some degree the priority given to a curriculum area, including professional development.

Professional development was regarded as a crucial condition of work, with whole school approaches generally being seen as of greater benefit to school-wide teaching and learning than individually targeted professional development. Schools found it useful to identify professional development needs from analysing data on student learning. Most professional development was related to improving achievement in curriculum areas. Many schools focused on literacy and numeracy.

Six features common to professional development processes were identified by schools as being valuable:

- High expectations about student achievement were generated.
- Goals and benchmarks were developed across the whole school based on information about student achievement.
- Professional development was related to identified needs of students and teaching skills and knowledge.
- Professional development was offered for teachers, both as a staff group and as individuals. This took a variety of forms, including whole school workshops, teachers observing others teach, teachers working in pairs, teachers being observed and receiving feedback on their own teaching.
- Staff members who were skilled in the area of focus led professional development, as well as external facilitators.
- There was a belief that all teachers contributed to student achievement and all could develop professionally.

Conditions within the school supported professional development. This included time available during the school day to discuss teaching and learning and access to outside advisers and professional developers who had a high level of theoretical knowledge and ability to talk about and model pedagogical strategies.

Staff worked with parents in reporting about their child and suggesting home activities, supporting parents in low decile, ethnically diverse schools through establishing parent support groups, and involving parents in work and decision-making within the school.

There were different styles of principalship (top-down or collaborative), and these changed at different points in the development path; but most participants thought the principal's role was crucial to school development. Most of the 10 principals had strong determination, a love of their school, and were good communicators. They had sound educational knowledge and were lifelong learners. Leadership was not confined to principalship.

The government plays an important role in creating conditions to support schools, through its infrastructure for planning, funding, staffing, advisory support, monitoring, training, research and development. In the case studies, some schools seemed to be especially vulnerable:

- schools at the cutting edge of educational change;
- schools which are turning around from crisis;
- those with smaller rolls, where a large work burden rested on individual staff members and there was a sense of having to start over again if there were key staff resignation;
- low decile schools (1 and 2), where resources were meagre and fund-raising was being carried out for basic curriculum activities;
- schools with a high number of children for whom English was a second language, where extra efforts were needed to communicate with families.
- schools catering for transient students, who were shown often to be achieving less well than other students.

Broader economic and social policies were significant, especially for low decile schools. Some staff thought government education and housing policies since 1999 had brought a less competitive environment between schools, a less transient population since the introduction of income-related rents, and more parents in paid employment. These changes benefited student well-being and led to greater stability.

Views of Experienced School Sector Personnel

What is School Improvement?

Student learning lay at the heart of views of school improvement held by experienced school sector personnel. But there were three different underlying approaches:

- the concept of school improvement as *school development,* generated by those in the school, in their own terms, to meet local needs, with an emphasis on processes and school culture;
- an emphasis on school improvement as *lifting school performance* where needed, and with government support, to meet national standards of performance in terms of legislation and goals related to raising student achievement and closing gaps, but seeing the role of school culture, values, and ownership of needs analysis and goals as fundamental to any change;
- an emphasis on school improvement as focusing on *meeting national or international academic standards,* within a competitive environment.

Principals, teacher educators, academics, and researchers tended to hold the first approach, which was closest to the experiences of the ten schools.

The Role of Government

The different viewpoints were associated with different ideas on how schools should be supported, and the role that government agencies should play. Those who held broader views of the purpose of schools thought the role of government was to create conditions that enable all schools to flourish. In contrast, the view of school improvement as focusing on meeting national or international academic standards was associated with prescriptive measures of achievement, and application of a range of incentives to encourage schools to meet the measures.

Over a third of participants identified tensions between the role of ERO and school improvement. Most thought responsibility for a productive relationship rested with both the school and ERO, and that ERO needed to be responsive to the school's own goals. Accountability to ERO needed to be congruent with accountability to teaching and learning, with documentation serving both purposes. Some made suggestions on how ERO could better support schools:

- by reviewing against the school's own plans, including the adequacy of those plans;
- by having reviewers who were effective practitioners themselves, and knowledgeable about schools.

Most participants supported the new "assess and support" model, which had just been proposed in the review of ERO (Review Committee ERO, 2000) when we did our interviews; but one questioned ERO's capacity to assist schools, when he thought ERO's expertise lay in assessing schools; another thought that advice and audit should be separated; and a third warned that there should not be a shift in standards.

Most of the principals, schools sector representatives, and advisers gave examples of dissonance between requirements placed on schools and school development, some ways in which government agencies could improve their approach to schools, such as through better consultation and communication, and the importance of a sound foundation of good school staffing and funding for all schools. An implication is the need for government agencies to tailor their approaches to school needs, in order to create support systems that are integrated with the school's own efforts.

School Context

The participants identified important practices and conditions within schools to help them to improve. Most thought that an essential practice was the collection, analysis, and use of data to evaluate and plan in relation to student learning and school goals, and to communicate and be accountable to others. This view related to a concept of teaching as both an analytic and creative process.

Three participants commented that teachers often did not have adequate skills in data collection and analysis. In general, there was agreement that there needs to be a clear purpose for assessment, which should be of high quality, parsimonious, and put to good use.

Conditions were suggested to enable schools to make effective use of assessment data:

- undertaking an ongoing cycle of objective setting, planning, and evaluation;
- discussing assessment data and teaching and learning with the wider teaching team within the school;
- having a school-wide approach;
- accessing specialists;

- engaging students in what they think and experience;
- accessing examples from other schools;
- communicating with parents about assessments.

School vision and goals that are developed and "owned" by the school were seen as necessary for schools to sustain school improvement. The school culture needed to be in line with the vision. Most participants described how to translate vision and goals into practice, and how to evaluate or review progress in relation to them. This was described as a reflective and analytic process that had a purpose, used data collection and analysis, resulted in changed insights, involved all groups within the school, and was evaluated independently.

Professional development was regarded as an essential condition for sustainable school improvement, because the capacity of staff to learn and respond to information about students' learning needs to be built and supported. Clustering and mentoring schemes were regarded as valuable in providing collegial support and pooling expertise. Most participants supported the notion that in a school which is improving, teachers and principal need to be reflective practitioners, engaged in thinking and talking about educational ideas, teaching, and learning. Associated with this came a call for a literate workforce of teachers, who read widely and keep up to date with educational research and thinking. Underneath the ideas was an understanding that teaching is not mechanistic, but involves intellectual engagement, risk taking, and passion. Conditions to support teachers were identified as a leadership that values and models critical thinking, discussion, and investigation, time within the school day and at staff meetings for meaningful examination of educational issues, and access to a range of up-to-date, relevant research written for the classroom teacher. Access to high-quality advice and support was seen as a critical condition, and there was some criticism of New Zealand's patchy provision and variable standards of advisory services. One participant thought that primary teachers, because they are generalists, need specialist advice and support. Most thought that professional development needs to relate to the goals of the school.

Effective leadership was highlighted as a key to school improvement, especially by the principals, who talked mainly about principalship and the principal's role in building relationships, having an educational vision, setting a model, and recognising and encouraging attributes in others.

Most participants singled out the value of independent advice to boards on principal appointments, because they saw the principal as playing a key role. The workload of principals was seen as a barrier to school improvement, with principals in low decile, rural, and small schools perceived as facing stronger pressures. Two participants raised as a question whether it was desirable for schools to manage their own property, since property management is a lot of work, but there were different views on this.

There were three ways in which the roles of communities in relation to school improvement were depicted. One was as a "partnership" in respect to school planning and strategies. A second was as a source of tension, when relations between communities and the board or principal were not smooth. A third was in relation to the contribution that communities can make to education, if people are encouraged to be involved in meaningful ways.

Participants had different views on what three things would make the greatest difference in helping schools to improve. Principals focused on resourcing, staff development, and principal recruitment and training. National Ministry of Education and Treasury officials pinpointed understanding of the nature of school improvement, self-review and assessment, and building links with the community. Academics, teacher educators, and researchers emphasised professional development, access to funding related to identified areas where it is needed, and resources to enable enquiry. Regional Ministry of Education, Teacher Registration Board, and Te Puni Kōkiri representatives had views similar to the academics/researchers/teacher educators. Sector representatives and others tended to have views related to the needs of their constituencies.

Conclusion

In the overall conclusion, we point to the need for schools to create conditions to support reflective practice, and for a strong role to be played by government in offering the kinds of resources, support and professional development that enable schools to be effective learning organisations, continually improving.

1 OVERVIEW

In 1999, reflecting on a decade of school self-management in New Zealand, and reading the research on school effectiveness to provide a succinct guide for parents that would provide a deeper understanding than assumptions of quality linked to decile rating,[1] Cathy Wylie, NZCER chief researcher, started to think about how schools became effective. She saw a gap between the emphases in the research literature describing school change in other countries, and our own experience. Common factors in studies of schools that made noticeable change were professional development focused on learning, regular time for school staff to reflect, analyse, plan, and review together, and access to external support for these activities. The assumptions underlying the implementation of school self-management in the 1990s treated schools as stand-alone units, without supplying infrastructure which could support them. Governance and management, and compliance with legislation, were given prominence. Our NZCER national surveys of primary schools showed that only 30 percent of primary teachers had any non-teaching time to work together in 1999, and that was less than the 35 percent who had this in 1989. Government support was increasing for some schools and clusters, but with time limits of just a few years, often within a contractual framework.

So how did New Zealand schools make substantial change? Why did schools feel the need to make change? Did they change simply in reaction to outside pressure, or as a result of their own values? Did change become an everyday practice, or need heroic effort? What kind of change is sustainable over time? How important are government provision and accountability frameworks?

The research reported here is the first phase in a study which we hope will help to provide some answers to those questions, and provide useful accounts for educators and policymakers of the different journeys that schools can take.

In this first phase, we describe the changes and processes of change that have occurred in ten urban primary schools over the last few years. These primary schools were recommended to us as schools which were doing good work, and which were on the move. One of the things we learnt was that few outsiders have shared knowledge of the work of schools in their area. Our original plan of identifying possible schools in two areas in New Zealand by collating the recommendations of local people from sector organisations and government agencies was not feasible.[2]

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[1] Appendix 1.

[2] Before 1989, inspectors working with the school boards provided reliable and rich sources of information about schools in their area.

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We also describe the views of school improvement held by experienced school sector personnel, including government officials, organisational representatives, academics and teacher educators who work with schools on their development. The work of these people is important for schools, since it provides a context that can support, constrain, or cut across the efforts of schools to improve their practice. Student learning lay at the heart of these views, with three different underlying approaches:

- the concept of school improvement as *school development*, generated by those in a school, in their own terms, to meet local needs, with an emphasis on processes and school culture;
- an emphasis on school improvement as *lifting school performance* where needed, and with government support, to meet national standards of performance in terms of legislation and goals related to raising student achievement and closing gaps, but seeing the role of school culture, values, and ownership of needs analysis and goals as fundamental to any change;
- an emphasis on school improvement as focusing on *meeting national or international academic standards*, within a competitive environment.

The first approach was shared by teacher educators, principals, academics, and researchers. Government officials tended to take the second approach. The third approach, which was least common, was taken by the New Zealand Business Roundtable, a sector representative, and a principal.

The first approach was closest to the actual experiences of the ten schools in this study, and reflects a policy environment where more infrastructure to support schools has become available since 1999, and the emphasis on raising performance has not been accompanied by prescriptive national tests or cut-off points.[3] All ten schools had a clear focus on raising student achievement, and most had assessment data showing improvements. Assessment data is discussed on pp. 19–22.

This research was undertaken in 2001. In the second phase of the study, we hope to return to the ten primary schools in 2004, to see what further change has occurred, and whether the platforms for further development which we saw in 2001 did indeed foster ongoing positive change: sustainable school improvement.

School Improvement: Everyday Life, or Heroic Action?

Interest in understanding how schools become "effective" and ways to foster school improvement has grown greatly. NZCER has added another dozen books on the subject to its library in the last two years alone. Both of these concepts have a range of meanings. There is probably more understanding now that school effectiveness is not the clearly visible summit of a peak, to be reached through a defined route (improvement).

School improvement covers a spectrum. On the one hand, it can be seen as an ongoing process—perhaps better thought of as school development—in which one might see the same principles at work over a period of years, but taking different shape. On the other, it refers to more dramatic movement, turn-arounds from situations of crisis. Wherever schools are on this spectrum, they share the intention—more than a desire—to enrich student learning. For some, the enrichment can be thought of as vertical, manifest in higher levels of measurable achievement and activity. Others can afford to take a more horizontal approach, to extend the learning that lies within already high levels of measurable achievement.

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[3] This contrasts with the UK and the USA. A useful recent article summarising some of the key issues associated with this approach is Olson, L., "'Inadequate' yearly gains are predicted", *Education Week*, 3 April 2002, pp. 1, 24–26.

Recent work on value-added by schools, taking into account the existing performance levels of their intake, has shown that it is often quite hard to separate schools from one another in terms of student achievement, and therefore to have distinct groups of schools in terms of their effectiveness (e.g., Goldstein, Huiqui, Rath, and Hill, 2000; Rowe, 1999). New questions have been raised about whether schools are always effective for all their students, or for all subjects, with more *within* school variance showing than *between* school variance. A new generation of studies looking at school results over time also shows that an individual school's average performance is not consistent over time, making it harder to stratify schools according to their effectiveness—or, to continually meet set standards or goals related to student achievement (e.g., Gray, Goldstein, and Thomas, forthcoming; Kane and Staiger, 2001).

Indicators of Effectiveness

According to MacBeath (1999, p. 9) "the search for the effective school is like the hunt for the unicorn, a quest for a mythical entity". Typically, researchers have studied schools which have high proportions of students who score well on standardised tests, and have linked school performance with particular school characteristics, such as professional leadership, unity of purpose, order and high expectations for student learning (Bennett and Harris, 1999, p. 535).

The resulting sets of indicators of effectiveness would be difficult to disagree with: they are broad, and they fit with other research on learning. Sammons et al. (1995) reviewed more than 160 studies to create a list of 11 factors operating at the school level:

1. shared vision and goals;
2. a learning environment;
3. positive reinforcement;
4. concentration on teaching and learning;
5. monitoring of progress;
6. a learning organisation;
7. professional leadership;
8. home-school partnerships;
9. purposeful teaching;
10. high expectations;
11. pupil rights and responsibilities.

Yet these are abstract factors. It is one thing to read these, and another to work out what shape they might take within a particular school, and what priority to give one factor over another in terms of the order of action or allocation of financial and human resources.

Indicators of Improvement

One conceptualisation of effective schools, which provides coherence to such lists of factors or conditions as the one above, is of "rational, goal-oriented systems" with clear and agreed goals. Goals relate to student achievement, and are results-focused and measurable (Bennett and Harris, 1999, p. 535). The new schools' planning and reporting framework, contained in the Education Standards Act 2001, explicitly emphasises such an approach as a way to improve schools (Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 1). However, recent English research suggests that assumptions about the nature of strategic planning in school resource allocation may not be found in practice, especially in smaller schools (Levacic et al., 2000). Most of the officials we spoke with about school improvement also valued the use of achievement data to raise student performance as an essential aspect of school improvement.

The ten schools in this study do have a systemic approach to their work, and a clear focus on student learning. But not all their goals are measurable, and their views of student learning encompass more than achievement on tests. They take both a horizontal and a vertical view of student learning. They are perhaps less rational and goal-oriented in a narrow sense, and more attuned to the spirit of students, teachers, and parents and the community. They find ways to celebrate, affirm, and lift confidence.

The Creation of Self-Recognition and the Role of Positive Mirrors

Often the first priority in the processes of change was the creation of a community which could recognise itself positively. This was particularly important for schools where the impetus for change came from external attention and devaluation, such as a poor ERO review reported by local media, which led to substantial roll drops.

Changes in the quality of buildings and playgrounds take on important symbolic meaning: improvements here can provide positive mirrors which show the people who learn and teach in them that "we" matter, we have substance, and we can make a difference. There are other ways in which schools can build up new reflections in which to see themselves with more pride, more confidence. One school focused on developing sports teams (with uniforms). Others worked to get coverage of their celebrations and changes in local media, or, further along, entered national competitions for schools, or put themselves forward as lead or anchor schools for clusters.

Student behaviour, particularly in playgrounds, was another initial priority, particularly by schools coming out of crisis. There were quite different approaches to student behaviour in the ten schools, but each school had systems that emphasised student responsibility in relation to peers and school staff. Again, this is another way to provide a positive "we" experience.

Work with parents and the community also provides opportunities for positive mirrors, affirming the role of teachers, while extending the size of the "we". The schools in this study have found ways to involve parents more. Teachers are available to parents, visible to parents. They provide them with more information about student achievement, and enlist their interest and support to strengthen areas of weakness.

Shared occasions are made for celebration, or to unpack the mysteries of new curriculum and assessment. Ways are found for shy parents to contribute to the school, and gain confidence. Trustees saw themselves as part of the "we", providing ideas and resources, and representing the school positively: part of a shared endeavour.

In schools where change came with new principals brought in after crisis, some existing staff could not identify with the new "we", and left. The principal plays a key role in shifting schools and building platforms for change. It can take longer for a teaching principal to work with staff to develop shared values and systems, and support to make those values live.

Strong Leadership

Leadership is not confined to principals. Most of the ten principals had an iron determination, as well as being good communicators, with a love of their school and its students, and sound educational knowledge. They were also inveterate learners, taking part in mentoring groups and professional associations, professional development, and study. They provided good models for their staff, and most encouraged others in their school to take on leadership roles.

Meaningful Effort

Creating and living an affirming culture is an important dimension to the ability of school staff to put in the effort required for change in schools. This effort appears to be sustainable in schools which have a culture of continual development: staff did not speak of any tensions between their dedication to their school and students, and finding time or room for their own families and interests. We did hear of such tensions in the other schools in our sample: schools which are "turning around", and schools which serve communities that experience considerable poverty and transience. Schools which have also positioned themselves at the cutting-edge of educational change, and attract substantial external attention, may also put heavy demands on staff.

The loads were not light, but they were not unevenly distributed. Staff were working in collaborative cultures, able to share experiences, both good and bad, and to provide each other with support. Talk in staffrooms at breaks was often used for this purpose, rather than to put the classroom behind them. Planning and evaluating became priorities for staff meetings.

There were also gains in student learning and behaviour to be witnessed and enjoyed. Some were substantial, some quickly observable; other gains were slight in overall terms, but mattered for individual students.

Real Stimulus

Another key ingredient in the effort which school staff make to improve student learning is their participation in stimulating professional development, which had a direct bearing on their teaching and support. All the schools put a premium on ongoing professional development, often with a whole-school or whole-area emphasis. They were selective in the Ministry of Education funded contracts they went for, and had learnt to limit what they took on. Quite a few of the principals and teachers felt that they also needed to set limits on the curriculum they covered: better to go fully and deeply, than broad and shallow. They used external advisors whose worth was proven. They put into practice what they learnt, and analysed its effect.

Changing beliefs and practices is hard, as Phillips, McNaughton, and MacDonald (2002, p. 99) point out, because existing classroom structures and practices have to be left intact while new ones are developed or old ones refocused. There may be competing beliefs that need to be judged. Practicalities of limited time and large class size can impose constraints. Teachers need good reasons to change their practice. Changes in belief for teachers in the ten schools were associated with whole school professional development that engaged the teaching staff in developing a shared vision of what they wanted to achieve, and collaborative beliefs about expectations of "good" work in specific curriculum areas, and the strengths and weaknesses of current approaches and programmes. Teachers were keen to find out more about their students' learning, and how they could improve it, and were paying more attention to analysing individual pieces of work and contributions in class.

Finding One's Own Way

The ways in which the ten schools operated and worked were not formulaic. There were different approaches to curriculum learning areas, and different degrees of breadth and focus, with all putting singular energy into numeracy and literacy, while some schools offered a range of extension activities.

The schools that have a culture of continual development had a single-minded focus on student learning, through critique and development of classroom teaching. These schools displayed features that were congruent with the overseas research, and with the views of the experienced teacher-educators we interviewed, who emphasised that schools need to debate the curriculum within their own context and generate their own values—not as a static one-off discussion or formation for an accountability document, but through an evolving process. The schools were confident enough to draw their own curriculum priorities.

Schools that had to deal with turning around crises of poor image, low morale, and strained relationships were less able to apply this singular focus, more apt to also put effort into "marketing" their school and ensuring that they would gain favourable ERO reviews. They tended to make greater use of external support in aspects of school operation that were not directly related to classroom teaching.

Yet each of the schools had a sense of ownership about their values, and the goals and processes that came from those values. These values included high expectations for student learning, and a real belief that schools could make a difference for all children. Teachers in the low decile schools acknowledged the obstacles their students faced, but they were interested in making bridges for the students and their families which began with respect for their lives, and a sometimes tremendous sense of responsibility to provide opportunities for students to learn and experience success.

The teachers in low decile schools operated in conditions which could make the sustainability of change in these schools more precarious. Their curriculum resources were often meagre, and fund-raising was being carried out for basic curriculum activities, rather than extension. The additional demands on staff to build bridges with parents, especially if there was a range of ethnic groups, and highly mobile families, appeared to foster higher turnover. This has implications if key staff leave, and curriculum knowledge and community knowledge and contacts go with them.

Broader economic and social policies had a particular significance for low decile schools. Staff at two of the four low decile schools, although not asked explicitly, thought government education and housing policies since 1999 had brought a less competitive environment between schools, a less transient population since the introduction of income-related rents, and more parents in paid employment. These changes impacted positively on student stability and well-being, and on the work of the schools.

The Role of External Support

None of the ten schools operated in isolation.

They benefited from open doors within education: to professional developers, advisors, networks of other principals and teachers, access to national organisations for staff and trustees, and the availability of useful curriculum and assessment resources. Getting a wider view, and using specific expertise where this was relevant to their goals, helped enhance the core work of teaching and learning. Shining examples came through of the value of Ministry of Education professional development contracts in helping schools clarify pedagogical goals and values, leading to change in classroom practice. Those schools that took part in the Literacy Enhancement Project found the workshops, the critical feedback, and the opportunities to observe other teachers and work together to develop literacy goals, and to assess and evaluate students' work, gave them an inspirational process that had an impact on teaching and learning. Teachers talked of how their participation had generated higher expectations for student learning, a sense of excitement about learning within the school, and a willingness to take risks by trying new things. They had also learnt to value working together to develop exemplars for student work, so that there were common standards operating through the school, and teachers could feel confident in their judgments. Again, such work also helps sustain a shared culture.

Assessment remains an area in which teachers particularly value external support and advice to develop or select appropriate assessment tools, decide what data to collect and analyse, and use the data to plan teaching programmes and improve teaching. Teachers also learn from communicating with teachers in other schools.

The schools' confidence with literacy and numeracy, and the priority they gave it, was not matched in other curriculum areas. Science operated on the margins, often under the leadership of newly trained teachers, or without any teacher taking responsibility to lead the area for the school. We suspect this is because there is no national focus on science and no professional development contracts offered to support it, even though good science curriculum resources are available. If curriculum areas are not integrated, the schools tend to cut the curriculum down.

They also opened their doors to government, community, and church agencies supporting vulnerable children or families, particularly in low decile schools. They sought out opportunities for sponsorship, support, and for their staff to work with others as educators and advisors. Building strong linkages was influential in supporting students, the staff, parents, and the school. These linkages tended to be long-term, and to develop over time.

Where meaningful connections were not built, as in ERO reviews that did not have relevance to the school's own goals, the interaction had no value in making a genuine contribution to school development. In these cases, compliance with outside requirements was achieved, but not much else. ERO reviews could precipitate a crisis which led to positive action, but the review itself was of use in only one school. The "naming and shaming" of one school that occurred after a bad ERO report was not constructive, and heightened problems rather than helping the school. In most of the school accounts, ERO did not emerge as a key player in contributing to school development, but as something that had to be accepted.

All schools did not express the same needs for external support in all areas. One example is responsibility for school property. One principal whom we interviewed, from a large school of over 700 students, complained that the time and effort involved in making property decisions detracted from vital educational goals. Yet other principals and board members relished this work, in part because the school environment is an important way to affirm the community of the school, and the value of its members.

In the Future?

Six underlying principles are apparent from the picture of change in the ten schools in this study, within the recent policy environment:

- the creation of self-recognition and the role of positive mirrors;
- strong leadership;
- meaningful effort;
- real stimulus;
- finding one's own way;
- the role of external support.

What we are particularly interested in is whether these principles will be still apparent in three years' time, and whether we will see continued differences in patterns of change. For example, does a change of principal have a different impact in schools which have developed cultures of continual improvement from those which are recently turned around, or at the cutting edge? How do schools move into cultures of continual improvement? Does it matter if some schools have higher staff turnover, or remain reliant on recruitment of teachers without other responsibilities or commitments? Most of the whole school professional development was related to literacy and numeracy, particularly in low-decile schools. Will schools move on to tackle science, or other curriculum areas? Will they focus on curriculum integration? How much of their professional development opportunity and decision-making is related to government priorities? How will these schools use the new schools' planning and reporting framework?

2 DIFFERENT CIRCUMSTANCES, DIFFERENT PATHWAYS

Choosing the Schools

This section outlines the ten schools in the study, and their different paths.

The main criteria for selection of the ten schools was that they had made deliberate efforts to bring about positive developments in student learning in the last three to five years, and these efforts were having an impact. In this respect the school could be regarded as "improving" or "developing". The timeframe of improvement over three to five years was chosen because we wanted to find out more about the processes of change, and to focus on schools where change continued to occur.

We excluded schools that were currently in Schools Support, since we wanted to see how schools without special supportive measures made progress in their own terms. Anecdotal information from the sector representatives and officials we interviewed was that development in small schools was particularly vulnerable to the movement of the principal or other staff members, so we did not include small schools (those with rolls of less than 150 students).

Initially, we decided to look for schools in Hawke's Bay and Wellington, so that we could compare experiences of schools in a provincial and urban setting. Our approach to identifying schools was to seek advice from people and organisations within the school sector whom we would expect to have a good local knowledge of schools. We asked representatives from NZEI Te Riu Roa, local principals' associations, New Zealand Principals' Federation, Association of Proprietors of Integrated Schools, NZ School Trustees Association, Ministry of Education and Education Review Office officials, and professional development advisers to recommend schools. We checked ERO reports of schools that were recommended. One surprise was the limited overall knowledge that was held of local schools. Some representatives were unable to make suggestions. This suggests that there is no clear group of people holding a detailed knowledge of all the primary schools in a given area.

We received recommendations for a range of schools in the wider Wellington region. Schools that were recommended in Hawke's Bay were either in the Flaxmere area (which we had ruled out; since Flaxmere is one of the Schools Support projects), were very small, or were only recently starting to make positive change. We considered two other provincial areas—Nelson and Palmerston North—but similar issues arose there. We therefore decided instead on a second urban area—Auckland—where a good selection of schools was recommended, and included one Palmerston North school. Our sample size was limited to ten largely for budgetary reasons.

Schools were invited to participate by phone call and a follow-up letter (Appendix 2). All the schools approached in this way agreed to take part. The sample is a mix of school types, roll sizes, and decile types. We chose a larger number of low decile schools (deciles 1 and 2), since we were interested in identifying specific issues faced by them.

Table 1 sets out some main characteristics of the ten schools. The names have been changed, often to names chosen by the schools themselves.

Data Collection

The aim of the data collection was to gather sufficient information about the school, from different perspectives of those in different roles in it, to provide a description of its journey through change, the challenges it faced, its responses to those challenges, and what the school is like now. Our aim was to provide an account of each school's individual journey, as well as to draw out common themes and patterns. The value of these individual stories is that they show school development as a living process, show how different aspects of school life relate to each other, and give an indication of the prioritising required in different contexts.

Data collected for the analysis were drawn from:

- Documentation from schools about their policies, school newsletters, statements of financial position, operations grant entitlement notices, 2002 provisional staffing notices, and other documented information, including some achievement data.
- Interviews with the school principal, literacy leader, science leader, three other teachers, the school secretary or office manager, a teaching support staff member, the chair of the board of trustees, and a group of parents. The two curriculum areas were chosen to include one which has had substantial government leadership and professional development support, and one which has not.
- Surveys of all teachers and support staff.
  These surveys were based on a questionnaire developed in Canada for the Halton Effective Schools project, and subsequent work by Stoll and colleagues in the Quality in Education Unit in Strathclyde (Stoll and Fink, 1996), which found links between items related to school culture and teaching, and gains for student achievement over time.
- Surveys of Year 4 students and Year 6 students in contributing schools, or Year 8 or Year 7/8 students in full primary schools and the intermediate school.
  These surveys included items drawn from the Competent Children longitudinal study, and the Quality of School Life inventory (ACER).

The full survey results for each school are given in a set of tables at the end of the account in that chapter, with the main themes included in the account.

The interview schedules and surveys are included in Appendix 3. We tape recorded but did not transcribe interviews. Those interviewed were given an information sheet and a signed consent form (Appendix 4).

Linda Mitchell and Marie Cameron undertook the case studies, beginning with a joint visit to one school. This enabled them to discuss their approaches and achieve consistency. Three days were spent in each school. The fieldwork took place from September to November 2001.

Table 1

Characteristics of the Ten Schools in the Study

School	Type	Roll Size	Decile	Student Ethnicity		Why School Recommended	Location
Steady development schools							
Pikitia	Contributing Primary	464	3	Pākehā Māori Pasifika "Other"	36% 33% 24% 7%	Identified by local principals as a school which continues to improve over time. The principal was interviewed in the first phase of the project.	Suburban
Rico	Contributing Primary	304	2	Pākehā Māori Samoan "Other"	61% 30% 3% 6%	Identified by ERO as "A good school, getting better", and a Ministry of Education official as "consistently good".	Suburban
Puriri	Contributing Primary	186	1a	Māori Pasifika Pākehā Asian Indian Papua New Guinea	44% 39% 10% 3% 3% 1%	Identified by a Ministry of Education official as an improving school that is "not an easy school", and by a curriculum facilitator as "Making big inroads over time. Moving ahead in literacy." Identified by an Educational Consultant who worked with the school on the Ministry of Education Literacy Enhancement Project.	Suburban
Freedom	Contributing Primary	395	7	European Māori Samoan Korean Middle Eastern Tongan African "Other"	71% 10% 4% 4% 3% 1% 1% 6%	ICT lead school. Recommended by a local principal and college of education lecturers. The principal was described as "vocal and go ahead" and the school as "widely respected".	Suburban
Roll-growth schools							
Windsor	Full Primary Run as a campus with primary and intermediate.	576	6	Pākehā Indian Māori Asian Tongan Samoan "Other"	51% 10% 8% 7% 5% 4% 15%	Recommended by a local principal as an improving school that had a good local reputation. Good ERO review. Roll growth.	Inner city urban
Tuna Nui	Contributing Primary	255	4	Pākehā Māori Pasifika "Other"	40% 32% 15% 13%	Recommended by university and college of education staff as an improving school. The principal was known to NZCER and was active in her cluster organising professional development workshops.	Suburban
Crisis turn-around schools							
Totara	Full Primary	233	1b	Māori Pasifika Asian Pākehā	38% 32% 15% 15%	Identified by school adviser as a school that operates effectively against the odds.	Suburban
Phoenix	Full Primary	225	5	Pākehā Māori Pasifika "Other"	66% 30% 2% 2%	Identified by a principal and an adviser as a school that has been the subject of an ERO discretionary review and is improving.	Suburban
Venture	Intermediate	585	2	Pākehā Māori Pasifika Asian "Other"	55% 23% 13% 6% 3%	Acknowledged by a Ministry of Education official as having been a successful low decile school for several years. Has had to institute an enrolment scheme to limit numbers.	Suburban
Villa	Contributing Primary	230	9	Pākehā Māori Asian Pasifika Middle Eastern	80% 13% 4% 2% 1%	Identified by a Ministry of Education official as a school that had been "at risk" and had shown considerable improvement in a short period of time. ICT lead school.	Provincial suburban

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3 THEMES AND ISSUES FROM THE TEN SCHOOLS

Before we turn to each of the schools individually, we draw out some common themes related to the process of change, and the conditions which supported them. Common elements in school development were:

- developing a school vision, culture, and focus;
- emphasis on student achievement, teaching, and learning;
- professional development and support for staff;
- working with parents and community;
- professional leadership, governance, and management.

The external environment, decile rating of the school, roll size, school funding and resourcing, and advisory/support services were influential in the stories of schools' development. These factors form a backdrop to the accounts.

The ten schools revealed different histories and different patterns of development. But we did find some patterns related to their starting points for change over the last three to five years. The three main "starting points" were:

- no clear starting point—cultures of steady development;
- rapid roll growth;
- crisis.

Three Development Paths

Cultures of Steady Development

Four schools could be described as being in a state of steady development. Two of these, Rico and Puriri, served low income communities (decile 2 and decile 1a); Pikitia was decile 3, and Freedom was decile 7. All schools had principals who had been in the school for a reasonable time (6, 13, 12, and 8 years respectively). In each of these schools, the most recent move was to raise teacher expectations of student achievement, and work to improve student achievement and behaviour. These schools placed a strong focus on classroom teaching and on teachers' commitment to developing their assessment, planning, and teaching practices to benefit students' learning. In all schools, school-wide professional development played a critical part, including critique and development of classroom teaching, and engagement of students within a learning community.

Two of the three lower decile schools had another strong platform in their concerted efforts to engage parents. They worked to develop greater coherence between school and home, or school and early childhood centre, through a range of measures.

All these "steady development" schools had developed links with community groups and local organisations, with the aim of strengthening resources for students and families.

Roll-growth Schools

Windsor School grew from 300 to 575 students from 1998 to 2001 to service a rapidly growing population in what had been a declining area. Tuna Nui School increased its roll by a third, from 193 to 255 students, in three years, because of changed community perceptions rather than demographic change.

The philosophies, climate, and programmes of each of the two "roll-growth" schools seemed to closely match the expectations and needs of the communities from which their students were drawn.

Windsor School (decile 6 overall) catered for many students in its primary campus from a decile 10 community. The principal reported high parental academic expectations, which the school tried to meet. Extension classes were provided for gifted students, and intermediate students had options to learn Japanese, French, architectural design, banking and shares, journalism, drama, book club, te reo Māori, and future problem solving. "State of the art" ICT amenities were provided; these, along with an attractive environment, were seen as necessary for the school to match high socio-economic status parental expectations. The school provided help for students with special learning needs, including those struggling with literacy and numeracy. It had a double satellite unit from a special school.

The roll growth in this school occurred because of demographic changes, as well as the school's ability to attract more students. The school proactively marketed itself to future parents, by visiting early childhood centres and welcoming visits from parents. Parents were involved in the school as volunteers, and teachers and the principal made themselves available to parents one night a week.

Tuna Nui was a decile 4 primary school that was also proactive in talking about the school to prospective parents, by holding information evenings in local early childhood centres and making school facilities available to these centres. The school had a reputation for inclusive education, for supporting cultural diversity, valuing Māori kaupapa and language, and for its extracurricular activities.

One of the challenges for both schools was adjusting to roll growth, including recruiting new teachers and coping with staff changes. Windsor School used structural means to preserve the "family" atmosphere of the school by organising the school as a campus with separate primary and intermediate schools, two deputy principals, and a school uniform for the intermediate. School-wide approaches to planning and assessment were instituted by new senior staff and offered consistency and support for teachers. Organisational structures in curriculum areas also brought teachers from across the school together with a shared purpose, and the strengths of each member of staff were used in professional development. These structures and practices enabled the school to cope with staff change, because all staff understood and could work with new staff members and support teaching and learning.

In Tuna Nui School, strong links with the community were assisted by the local knowledge of the principal and other staff members who had lived in the community for many years. The fact that the principal was Māori helped her to gain the confidence of

Māori parents. Her collaborative approach and shared leadership enabled common understandings and staff capacity to be built.

Crisis Turn-around Schools

The four schools that started from a point of crisis (Villa, Phoenix, Venture, and Totara) all had negative publicity at the crisis time that was causing parents to take their children away, and rolls to decline. In each of the schools, the previous principal had resigned or been counselled to leave, and there was a culture of low staff morale and division. The appointment and leadership of a new principal was the catalyst for positive change in these schools. In all four schools, the principal was committed to analysing and dealing with the problems, but they did this work in different ways.

One of the first tasks done by each principal was to clarify management and governance roles. Each developed a constructive relationship with the board chair, and training was provided to trustees. This relationship played an important role in providing backing for the principal, as well as an avenue for linking with parents, hearing their views, and involving them in school operation in a meaningful way. In the two low-income and culturally diverse schools, efforts were made to recruit parents from different ethnic groups to the board.

In one school where ERO had highlighted the need for policy development, the principal worked with the senior management team and the board chair to draft policies. In another school, the principal drafted these with the board chair, then took them out to the community and staff.

It seems symptomatic of schools in crisis that there is low morale and division amongst staff, and often between the school and community. The schools showed different ways of approaching these problems, but it was apparent that in order to move forward, a positive climate needed to be generated. This was done in two schools by making structural changes to organisation at syndicate or classroom teaching level, and so breaking down barriers. The accounts of Villa and Venture suggest that syndicates can operate in two different ways—as a source of collaboration and pedagogical support, or as a source of divisiveness.

Leadership Styles

Leadership styles and approaches to lifting staff morale and bringing staff into a coherent team varied, although this challenge faced three of the schools. The principal of Villa School was ruthless about "shifting poor performing staff" (in his view) and appointing staff who were sympathetic to his performance expectations. He saw himself as a "fix-it" man, who liked to sort out a problem and then move on. At the start of his leadership, most teachers were required to move from their classrooms to a different room. Only 3 of the 12 original teaching staff remained in the school three years after his appointment, although 2 were on short term contracts with other educational institutions. The others had been replaced by younger teachers. The co-operation of teaching staff seemed to have been gained by selecting staff to fit the principal's agenda, as well as involving and bringing along those staff who remained. While the principal said he encouraged staff and students in the school to take on leadership roles, there was a common view that the changes to the school and the direction in which it was heading were largely attributable to the principal. In the other schools, the principal and staff credited the senior management team with playing a highly influential role in the change process.

A different approach was taken by the principal of Phoenix School, who recognised the need to "build strength from within", and worked with staff to build morale. She also recognised the importance of a strong management team, and worked closely and collaboratively with this team within the school. Staff members' work was acknowledged, and lines of communication were opened up. The ERO review had pinpointed inadequacies in curriculum coverage, and staff were supported through a range of opportunities for professional development in all curriculum areas. While there was some staff turnover because of redeployment, which resulted in staff changing classrooms, there was no requirement for staff to change, and no teacher was removed because of competency proceedings.

School Image

The four "crisis turn-around" schools all worked to change the physical and social environment of the school and to improve a poor public image. There were common approaches to this task: making the school grounds and buildings attractive and the environment welcoming, working to ensure high standards of student behaviour, and developing links with the community. Two schools were engaged in active marketing, through strategies aimed at attracting media coverage for positive achievements and events, and gaining awards for individual students. Phoenix School actively pursued relationships with local reporters and businesses, and promoted "good news stories" in the media. This school also entered students into national competitions, where some gained awards. Villa School entered itself into the Goodman Feilder Awards, and gained one of these.

Effective professional leadership, management, and governance at the crisis time is crucial. One school relied initially on the principal and board chair for direction and vision, but others had a participatory approach, using the skills and knowledge of the diversity of staff within the school to develop the direction. This makes it more likely that development is embedded into the life of the school, and can be sustained when a principal leaves.

All schools pursued their goals and direction with tenacity. Goals became more singularly focused on student learning, as immediate challenges of negative image, dysfunctional relationships, and other individual problems were addressed. These schools are now like the "steady state development" schools described below.

Vision, Culture, and Focus

All ten schools had clarity of purpose about school goals. These goals were shared and understood by all staff. In all schools, a core focus was on student learning and the right of every child to a sound education. Some schools described ways in which values about interactions with others were built up through discussion within the school community, and how these were modelled by adults in the school. Having a "shared vision" and common philosophy seemed to encourage adults to be united in their approach, and consequently to have a stronger impact. The "vision" was not static. In the "crisis turn-around" schools, some pressing immediate goals lost their predominance after schools had successfully overcome problems of poor image and relationship difficulties. In these schools, the focus moved more intensively to student learning and behaviour once other issues had been addressed. Phoenix School, where the acting principal used the non-compliances in the ERO review as the basis for the management plan, generated and implemented its own goals after the school had addressed the non-compliances.

Teaching and Learning

High Expectations

A hallmark of the schools was the common belief that every child could learn and be successful. Teachers and principals held high expectations for student achievement. Statements reflecting these beliefs and expectations were particularly evident in the low decile schools, where social difficulties were not used as an excuse for low achievement. These schools actively resisted a "deficit" approach, recognising the skills and knowledge which each student brought to school. These schools believed they could make a difference, and one described itself as a "cycle breaker".

Pikitia School and Rico School provide examples of how teachers' perceptions of children's capabilities and expectations of children changed over time, through the school's involvement in Ministry of Education professional development contracts (respectively, the SEMO professional development initiative to strengthen literacy practices in the first year of schooling, and the Literacy Enhancement Project). These changes in belief were associated with changes in teaching practices. Students were "pushed" and extended. At Pikitia School, teachers modified their attitudes to learning approaches, shifting from a view that students needed time to settle in to school before formal teaching could begin to providing a mix of both developmental and formal teaching. Teachers were taking a more analytical approach to teaching and learning, and seeing that they could gain more understanding about individual students' learning needs from looking more closely at student work. David Stewart (2000, p. 149), writing about principals in a principals' mentoring group, noted the importance of such shifts in thinking: "It was an accepted maxim that 'you best change what teachers do by changing the way they think about what they do'."

Student Feedback

In most schools, student feedback was used to extend students, by offering them insight into the strengths and weaknesses of their own and others' work. This was associated with expectations that students would be responsible for taking a critical approach to their own learning. Rico School gave examples of how teachers were explicit with student groups about what was good work, and why, and how they identified with individual students the specific things they needed to work on, and why. At Totara School, classrooms were organised so that there was "space" for the provision of specific sustained feedback for every student at least once a week. As well, professional development highlighted ways of recording feedback and sharing goals with students. Phoenix School used a system of student-led conferences to involve students in reporting and discussing their work with parents and teachers.

Curriculum Focus

All schools put major focus on literacy and numeracy, reflecting the national emphasis under the National Administration Guidelines (NAGs) to give priority to student achievement in literacy and numeracy, the availability of Ministry of Education funded professional development contracts, and teachers' own views that these learning areas provide the foundation for other learning, and are key to participation in New Zealand society. Since science is not a current government focus, we purposely interviewed the science leader in each school, to see what emphasis it was given. Most schools either tried to integrate science, or gave it little emphasis and allowed it to slip back. Schools were generally unaware of new curriculum resources, possibly because this material was sent to schools without professional development. The view that the curriculum framework tried to cover too much came through in many comments about the unrealistic demands of the mandated curriculum.

The schools seemed able to be more creative under the revised NAGs to use achievement objectives selectively. The NAGs provide direction in six areas of school operation: curriculum requirements, documentation and self-review, employer responsibilities, financial and property management, health and safety, and administration and were revised (effective from July 2000) to provide, (amongst other things), some flexibility in monitoring, assessing, and reporting on student progress. The revision sought to link the monitoring of student progress and analysis and use of assessment data with strategic planning, self-review, and planning for staff professional development.

The greater flexibility allowed schools to actively construct their own goals, in response to analysis of the performance and needs of individual students and groups of students. This approach seemed to help engender a sense of responsibility to enhance student learning. In addition, schools seemed to be doing less, but in greater depth, either by cutting back or by integrating the curriculum, and taking approaches that suited their school community. Pikitia School connected learning experiences by addressing achievement objectives from several curriculum areas in a single unit of work, as well as integrating planning and assessment. Windsor School's approach was to pare back to basics in literacy and numeracy in Years 1–3, then offer a rich range of extension classes for gifted and talented students, and Australian Testing in English, Science, and Mathematics, for Years 4–8. Villa School gave priority to literacy in "the four Rs: wRiting, aRts, aRithmetic and Reading". It encouraged students to work on real-life problems in context, so that learning was meaningful, and to investigate and communicate in a variety of ways, including the use of ICT.

Only one school, Phoenix, described its efforts to cover all the essential learning areas. These efforts to attain full coverage of the curriculum were in response to a poor ERO review. However, once the school was back into the regular 3-yearly ERO cycle, it became focused on literacy and ICT.

Assessment and Achievement

Assessment

Schools took varying approaches to assessment. Some schools, which were part of the Ministry of Education Literacy Enhancement Programme, learned how to develop and moderate their own benchmarks through their work on this programme. Teachers thought that this had had the very positive result of providing consistent shared standards across the whole school, and clarity of expectation and common grounds from which teachers could analyse and discuss teaching and learning. The process of thinking about benchmarks and analysing students' learning against them encouraged schools to use assessment diagnostically, rather than simply see assessment mainly as producing material for compliance with external directives.

Totara, Rico, and Venture schools made marked shifts from summative to formative assessment. The accounts of these schools show that knowledge and thoughtful analysis is required to evaluate and assess learning, and to consider the next steps for individuals and groups of students. Villa School used assessment "parsimoniously", with teachers recording only what they considered they would use or need to use.

The case studies showed that becoming "assessment literate" could be a struggle. Schools needed help to develop or select appropriate assessment tools, interpret the data, and use the data to improve learning. In one school, narrow factual recall information which measured one aspect only of student performance was being used to support instructional decisions. Some teachers still tended to see assessment as something that was done *after* teaching.

Data analysed in terms of student groups highlighted some differences that required further analysis and action. Several schools found ethnic and gender differences in achievement. Totara and Puriri found that their transient students had lower scores than those whose entire school life had been spent in the one school.

Several schools used automated systems for collecting data. The Villa principal opposed automated systems, on the grounds that he thought they reduced teachers' decision-making to mechanics.

Villa was the only school where there was not a school-wide effort to have consistency of planning and assessment across classes (except for some assessment records to "smooth the transition" from one class to another). Others, like Windsor and Tuna Nui, argued that consistency ensures a coherent progression of learning for students, and useful support for teachers. Collaborative approaches enabled teachers to share work and skills, and to gain confidence.

All schools used assessment data in reporting to their Board of Trustees. In general, schools tried to make meaning out of the data, and to use it as a basis for comparison with previous years and for discussion of what the school was doing to improve achievement.

Evidence of Growth in Student Achievement Over Time

We asked the schools to provide us with information about student achievement levels over time. We did not ask them to cover all curriculum areas. Such information was easiest for the schools to provide where they had developed school-wide exemplars or standards of expected achievement for different curriculum levels or units, or if they used standardised tests.

Some schools were changing the tests they used, which made it difficult to track change over time. Most of the schools provided analyses which gave more than average scores, enabling them to track the achievement of students at different levels, and identify students who needed additional attention. Some gave us information showing progress over the school year, evidence that they tracked student progress and identified areas of particular need (e.g., division in mathematics) at the start of the year, to help decide what to emphasise during their programme, and checked their teaching at the end of the year to see whether students had made sufficient progress to meet expectations.

The data schools gave us did indeed show that students benefited from their learning over the course of a school year. But this data could not show trends in student achievement levels over several years. It did provide snapshots of student achievement levels, and evidence of high achievement.

For example, in term 4 of 2001, at Pikitia school which is a decile 3 school, around 70 percent[4] of the Year 2 students were reading at or above the 6 year reading age, around 84 percent of the Year 3 students were reading at or above the 7 year reading age, around 72 percent of the Year 4 students were reading at or above the 8 year reading age, around 83 percent of the Year 5 students were reading at or above the Year 9 reading age, and around 82 percent of the Year 6 students were reading at or above the Year 10 reading age.

At Freedom, which is a decile 7 school, around 79 percent of Year 3 students were reading at or above the 7 years instructional reading level, around 96 percent of the Year 4 students were reading at or above the 8 years instructional reading level, 85 percent of the Year 5 students were reading at or above the 9 years instructional reading level, and 94 percent of the Year 6 students were reading at or above the 10 years instructional reading level.

Early Comparisons

Few of the schools provided data that went back beyond 2001. Trends in raising student achievement levels schoolwide can take some years to establish, with concerted effort. The initial comparisons which schools could make showed some encouraging trends.

The early results for the two schools which had an external advisor working on writing were encouraging. At Rico school, which had a strong professional development focus on writing, early 2002 writing scores on a common task were higher for Years 4–6 than the same task undertaken in early 2001, with the shift in scores most evident for Years 5 (12 percent meeting or exceeding expected levels of achievement in 2001, compared with 58 percent in 2002), and Years 6 (8 percent meeting or exceeding expected levels of achievement in 2001, compared with 72 percent in 2002).

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[4] These percentages are approximate because they were taken from graphs.

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At Puriri school, 2001 writing scores were markedly higher for Year 2 students (83 percent meeting expectations compared with 47 percent in 2000), Year 3 students (58 percent in 2001 compared with 44 percent in 2000), Year 4 students (37 percent in 2001 compared with 26 percent in 2000), Year 5 (21 percent compared with 3 percent in 2001), and Year 6 (56 percent in 2001 compared with 5 percent in 2000). Fifty-nine percent of students in 2001 were meeting their expected writing achievement, compared with 24 percent in 2000. The proportion of students under-achieving expected levels of achievement remained, however, at around a quarter for each year.

The assessment data supplied by Venture Intermediate showed improvement in student achievement between 2001 and 2002 for PAT reading comprehension and mathematics, and writing standards based on curriculum levels (each level was divided into two), particularly at the lower end.

Trends Over Time

Several schools were able to provide clear evidence of rises in student achievement levels over three or more years. It was not always constantly upwards, reflecting the natural variability of students, teacher expertise, and to some degree the priority given to a given curriculum area in a given year, including professional development. Sometimes scores would leap noticeably from one year to the next, and then remain much the same over the next two to three years. This is consistent with a U.S. study showing that student scores do vary over time, even in high performing schools. (Linn and Haug, 2002)

In Freedom school, the proportion of students scoring in the bottom quartile for PAT maths at Year 4 was 36 percent in 1998, falling to 15 percent in 2002, while the proportion of students scoring in the top quartile rose from 11 percent to 48 percent. Where 35 percent were scoring in the lower quartile for PAT maths at Year 5 in 1999, 27 percent of the Year 5 students did so in 2002, and the proportion in the upper quartile went from 10 percent to 26 percent over these four years. Thirty percent of the 1998 cohort were in the bottom quartile at Year 6 (and 16 percent in the top quartile); the 2002 Year 6 students had only 15 percent of students in the bottom quartile at Year 6, and 43 percent in the top quartile—both proportions which were better than the performance of this particular cohort in Years 4 and 5.

At Villa school, the average instructional reading book level jumped from 6 in 1999 to 11 in 2000, and remained much at that level for 2001 and 2002. There was a similar trend for 6 year net results.

At Tuna Nui school, results from 1999–2001 using Wellsford maths tests for addition and subtraction show consistently high proportions of students—around 90 percent—achieving a mark of more than 50 percent. Year 5, 6, and 7 student scores on the maths tests for multiplication and addition increased on the whole between 2000 and 2001. Six year net scores for vocabulary median scores were 2 in 1997, and rose to 3.5 in 1998 and 1999; and letter identification scores rose from a median of 6 in 1997 to 6.5 in 1998 and 1999.

At Totara school, (decile 1) reading book levels for Year 1 students in 2000 were one to two levels above the levels in 1998; most students were reading at 5.3 or higher by the end of their first year. Year 2 reading levels rose markedly between 1998 and 2000—from an average of 5.3 to a 6–8 range. There were also some increases in Years 3 and 4. In

Years 5–8, around two-thirds of the students read at or above their chronological age over the three year period, and around a quarter read at a level 1–18 months below their chronological age. The proportion of those reading two years or more below their chronological age was reduced from 15 percent in 1998, to 8 percent in 1999 and 10 percent in 2000.

Professional Development and Support for Staff

All the schools placed a high emphasis on professional development for teachers. Some stated that professional development for support staff was important too.

Individual or School-Wide Approaches to Professional Development

Most schools supported both individual and whole school approaches to professional development, but described different benefits from these. Participating in conferences, study, and courses as individuals had benefits in enabling staff to address their own individual learning needs. Contact with teachers, researchers, academics, and teacher educators outside the school could bring new ideas and perspectives, and encourage teachers to question their teaching practices, think about ideas and approaches, and articulate what they do and why. Pikitia School showed how working in USA schools on a demonstration programme of literacy effectiveness helped an individual teacher to understand her own practice better. The experience also had the effect of boosting confidence and offering a refresher to an experienced teacher. The Venture Intermediate principal believed that the teachers' and support staff members' passions, as well as school priorities, should be catered for. These views highlight the importance of each individual staff member taking responsibility for their own development of expertise and understanding, as well as being part of school-wide professional development.

However, a common view was that individualised opportunities for professional development did not bring benefits to other staff. The professional development that schools found most useful for enhancing school-wide teaching and learning involved teachers working together in a whole school approach. The Villa principal went so far as to state that in most cases, only professional development that involves the entire staff has the power to impact on classroom practice.

Whole School Professional Development

There were common themes threaded through the descriptions of whole school professional development. These themes related to:

- identification of professional development needs;
- professional development processes;
- conditions under which professional development was held.

Identification of Professional Development Needs

Each of the schools showed that analysis of data on student learning was a useful basis for identifying learning needs within the school, and pinpointing areas where a concentrated collective effort could lift achievement for all students, both as groups and as individuals. The most common examples of school-wide professional development were related to improving achievement in curriculum areas. In all schools, aspects of literacy and/or numeracy were reported to be a key focus. Three schools focused on ICT. Only one school had undertaken professional development in all seven essential learning areas.

There seem to be two main reasons why literacy and numeracy were singled out for professional development at this time. One is to do with the central role played by primary schools in teaching numeracy and literacy, and the common view that skills in these areas are necessary for successful participation in society. A second is to do with the government's objectives to improve literacy and numeracy, and the availability of Ministry of Education contracts in these areas. All nine primary schools had taken part in the first part of the Ministry of Education's Literacy Leadership Project for primary school principals, on developing a strategic framework and literacy vision for the school. Seven schools had participated in the third part, on using literacy materials. Four schools had undertaken or were undertaking the Literacy Enhancement Programme, involving a whole school approach over three terms to enhance literacy achievement. The focus of this work was on classroom practice.

Venture Intermediate, which was not eligible for this project, was taking part in work with an external consultant on developing benchmarks for achievement for written language. One school (Tuna Nui) was participating in Project Abel,[5] with an emphasis on assessment of the number strand in Mathematics. Another indicated that it would apply to be part of this project in 2002. One school had been part of SEMO's[6] Early Childhood Primary Link project.

Three schools (Freedom, Villa, Pikitia) were engaged in whole school professional development on aspects of ICT to support learning. These schools were particularly interested in using ICT as part of classroom programmes for teaching and learning. Villa was a lead ICT school for the area.

Features of Professional Development

There were common features to professional development processes that schools identified as being valuable.

- There were high expectations about student achievement.
- Goals and benchmarks were developed across the whole school based on information about student achievement.
- Professional development was related to identified needs of students and teaching skills and knowledge.
- Professional development was offered for teachers as a staff group and as individuals. This took a variety of forms, including whole school workshops, teachers observing others teach, teachers working in pairs, and teachers being observed and receiving feedback on their own teaching.

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[5] Project Abel (Assessment for Better Learning) is a Ministry of Education professional development contract for teachers.

- Staff members who were skilled in the area of focus led professional development, as did external facilitators.
- There was a belief that all teachers contributed to student achievement and all could develop professionally.

Conditions to Support Professional Development

Conditions within schools supported professional development. Time was made available to talk about teaching and learning at staff and syndicate meetings, and one school used a "buddy" system to bring new teachers on board. Outside facilitators were involved. Some principals said that they chose only those outside facilitators whom they knew were very good. Staff involvement from the beginning meant that all staff understood and "owned" the goals. Some schools developed their own benchmarks, as well as using national benchmarks. This process seemed to generate a sense of unity, as well as excitement at creating tools appropriate for local conditions. Student achievement was seen as the responsibility of all staff.

Parents and Community

Schools worked with parents in different ways:

- reporting to parents about their child;
- offering advice and encouragement for parents to reinforce learning at home;
- supporting parents through establishment of parent support groups (these were most common for parents of ethnic groups other than Pākehā);
- involving parents in decision-making by canvassing their views;
- involving parents in projects to support the school, such as fund-raising and resource development;
- involving parents through work with students, e.g., on school trips and in homework centres.

Staff in all schools thought that parents wanted to know where their child stood in relation to other students, in terms of broad levels. Parents indicated that they wanted comparative information, and to know what they could do to help their own child. Teachers in most of the schools were trying to report to parents with assessment information that could be understood and useful. All schools used a variety of methods of reporting: parent teacher evenings, formal written reports (e.g., with assessments and comment, portfolios of work), having an "open door" policy. Some schools were sending home annotated examples of students' work, explaining what was good and what needed to improve, and indicating the kind of help that could enhance learning.

There were different approaches to parent involvement in learning and participation in the school. These were associated with decile rating and ethnic diversity. Three lower decile and ethnically diverse schools had made special efforts to attract parents from representative ethnic groups to participate in the school. Pikitia invited parents to library

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[6] SEMO (Strengthening Education in Otara and Mangere) is a Ministry of Education schooling improvement initiative.

sessions and coffee and information mornings. Totara held a voluntary homework club, organised in response to requests from Sri Lankan parents and a Māori support group. Puriri had a Pacific parent support group and was part of the Home School Initiative Programme, was supporting the building of a Samoan A'oga Amata in its grounds, and involved Māori parents in weaving tukutuku panels.

These schools worked from the basis that parents have substantive knowledge and skills to enhance their own child's learning, and encouraged parents to use their skills and knowledge. Both Puriri and Totara encouraged parents to talk and read to their children in their own languages. Both had language books to lend. Pikitia created coherence in children's lives by drawing on its work in SEMO's Early Childhood Primary Link project to share expectations and information between parents, early childhood teachers, and primary teachers. It was proactive in identifying likely enrolments to the school, and inviting these families to pre-entry activities and events, where there was an emphasis on school practices and how parents could support student learning at home. Work with parents to build understanding for teachers, students, and parents may help achieve greater coherence in children's lives, and avoid mismatches between school and home. Work with parents provided satisfaction for teachers in these low decile schools, as well as challenges.

Professional Leadership, Governance, and Management

Styles of professional leadership varied in the ten schools, although many participants remarked that effective leadership was necessary for school improvement. Most regarded "leadership" as wider than principalship. Different styles of leadership were apparent in the ways in which staff were appointed and supported. There were two main approaches:

- Schools in which the principal saw his/her role as pivotal to school development and largely followed his/her goals and vision, especially in the early days after appointment. Within this approach, teachers who fitted the principal's vision for the school were appointed. At Venture Intermediate, there was an emphasis on appointing people who were "reflective by nature". In Villa School, the principal described new staff as young and enthusiastic, and willing to commit to high performance expectations.
- Schools in which the principal worked collaboratively with all staff to build goals. In these schools there was a strong theme that all staff had significant areas of expertise; efforts were made to foster these, and to provide opportunities for staff to share them.

A feature of all the schools was the "iron will" of the principal to build an effective school.

External Factors Related to Resourcing

Decile Rating

Some differences in school focus and operation were associated with decile rating. The four lower decile primary schools (deciles 1, 2, and 3) all made special efforts to build links with outside health and welfare agencies, and form productive relationships to benefit students, e.g., by arranging for health checks and discounted services. There was an emphasis in these schools on involving a culturally diverse community in the school, on working to strengthen the operation of the Board of Trustees, and on developing ways to involve parents in their children's learning. The lower decile primary schools had a strong focus on literacy and numeracy, and were less likely to offer enrichment programmes or a wide range of extra curricular activities.

Resources and Funding

All schools were active in seeking additional sources of funding, and none believed their funding was adequate. Table 2 sets out details of each school's decile rating, roll size, amount charged in fees and donations, and amount made in local fund-raising in 2000. The amounts raised by the schools themselves varied from $2,649 in a decile 1b school to $31,674 in a decile 9 school. Both these schools had similar numbers of students.

Table 2
School Fund-raising

School	Roll size	Decile rating	Amount raised in fund-raising 2000 (after expenditure on fund-raising)	Activity fee	Donation
Puriri	186	1a	$3,681	$40 one child $50 two children $60 three or more	Nil
Totara	233	1b	$2,649	$60 one child $100 two or more children $45 resource fee	Nil
Rico	304	2	$4,656	$40	$40
Venture Intermediate	585	2	$30,726	$30 one child $60 family $48 per year technicraft	Nil
Pikitia	464	3	$20,000		$30 one child $35 family
Tuna Nui	255	4	$33,815		Nil
Windsor	575	6	$24,176	$100 for IT, technology materials and internet use 1 Year 7–8	$95 (Yrs 1–6) $45 (Yrs 7–8)
Phoenix	304	5	$17,373	$3–$7 per activity about twice a term	$50 child $80 family
Freedom	395	7	$11,633	$80 per child $65 each if two or more children	Nil
Villa	230	9	$31,674	$32	$60 child $120 family

Middle and higher decile schools had greater capacity to fund-raise, and could ask for higher voluntary fees. Targeted funding enabled decile 1–3 schools to cover some costs that individual parents met over and above school fees and fund-raising in other schools, including school trips and lunches (for some students), and to contribute to literacy resources for home use, e.g., Duffy Books in Homes, a library of Pasifika language books.

Extracurricular activities and extension classes were a feature in higher decile and larger schools. These schools bought additional resources, especially in ICT.

The ways in which schools prioritised their spending indicated a commitment to professional development and support for student learning. Schools that had been bulk-funded[7] generally used the extra funding it provided to employ more staff. Schools which had not taken up bulk funding used their share of the funding redistributed when bulk funding ended to employ teachers or teacher aides to work with students, or to provide release time for senior staff to offer professional support for teachers.

The common use of operational funding to employ more staff to improve learning opportunities and professional capability raises an interesting question about the balance between operational funding and staffing in government support of schools.

Government Education and Housing Policies

Principals, some parents, and teachers in two of the lowest decile schools (Rico and Puriri) thought that recent government policy changes had brought positive change that was benefiting students, parents, and the school. They mentioned the following changes and their impacts:

- more money in the school system, following the abolition of bulk funding;
- a less competitive environment;
- a more positive public view of teachers;
- a more constructive role being played by ERO;
- educational decisions being made for the right reasons in consultation with communities;
- a greater sense of shared responsibility for education (not just the school's fault if the school did not "shape up");
- a less transient population, after the introduction of income-related rents enabled some families to remain in state houses;
- more parents in paid employment.

In one of these schools, it was noted that free or low-cost health care for children aged 0–6 had a noticeable impact on students' health, and needed to be extended to primary-aged students. One teacher thought itinerant vision and hearing testers would be a useful service, since some parents did not take their children to referred specialists because of cost. In the other school, teachers had made their own links with local specialists and doctors to develop a low-cost referral system for hearing and sight problems.

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[7] Originally known as bulk funded schools, then directly resourced schools, then fully funded schools.

Roll Size

Larger schools seemed to be less reliant on changes of individual staff, since there was a greater pool of staff to call on. The principal of the smallest school in the study (Puriri) expressed concerns that the school was about to lose three of its experienced staff members, through leave and career moves. He predicted that it would be hard to fill these positions and the expertise of the school would need to be rebuilt.

The progress of another of the smaller schools seemed dependent on key personnel, making its success also somewhat fragile. There was a large work burden on a few individuals.

Ministry of Education Professional Development Contracts

All the schools made good use of Ministry of Education professional development contracts. They were discerning about the programmes that they used, choosing professional development facilitators who were known to be highly effective. Participation in these programmes, and use of resources and funding from their involvement, helped teachers to better assess students, focus on needs, and lift achievement.

4. STEADY DEVELOPMENT SCHOOLS

There was no clear starting point for the schools described as being in a state of "steady development". These were stable schools, making positive change in teaching and learning over time. Some features contributed to the trajectories of continuous progress. These were an emphasis on student learning, agreed goals and expectations for learning, creation of a culture of enquiry and empowering views of learning.

Framing conditions within the schools supported staff. The adult work environment encouraged staff as well as students to be active learners. Ongoing, substantive professional development for all teachers in the school focused on curriculum areas that had been identified as areas of need. Professional development took place over an extended time period (12–24 months). Strong linkages were built with communities and outside agencies, creating coherence between systems, and contributing to students' learning and well-being. There was stable professional leadership, and reasonable staff stability.

PIKITIA SCHOOL

Introduction

Pikitia School Profile

School type	Contributing primary
Roll size	464
Decile rating	3
Locality	Suburban
Student ethnicity	Pākehā – 36%
	Māori – 33%
	Pasifika – 24%
	Other – 7%
Staffing entitlement	19 (including 0.8 for 4 beginning teachers)
Actual staffing	19
Teacher aides	6
Release	Assistant principal and deputy principal each have full release
Recommended	By local principals as "one which continues to improve over time", and principal was interviewed in the first phase of this research. ERO report described school as "a dynamic and vibrant learning community".

Pikitia School is a long-established contributing primary school, built on extensive mature grounds with attractive landscaping and fringed with large, mature trees. Parts of the school have been remodelled, an additional classroom block has been built because of steady roll growth, and there is a new administration building. Historical photographs recording its history over more than 100 years of primary education, framed class photos of current students, and school awards for excellence are displayed. There is a parent notice board, framed examples of children's art, and well-presented work from classrooms, including large self-portraits of Year 1 and Year 2 children, and paintings completed after a study of Matisse. Fresh flowers and plants grace the foyer. On the large reception desk is a box for donations for food for the school cat, and vermiliquid (a liquid fertiliser made from classroom worm farms) is for sale. The overall impression is welcoming and a sense of pride in children's accomplishments is evident.

The school is organised into two teaching syndicates, with the deputy principal responsible for the 10 multi-level junior classes, and the assistant principal responsible for the 6 multi-level senior classes. Both are fully released from teaching to allow them to support the learning and teaching in their syndicates.

Parental involvement is strong, and parents are supportive of their children's learning. For the last three years, the school year has begun with a family literacy picnic, where food is shared and parents bring a book to share with their child. Last year over 100 families attended.

Over 90 percent of families come to parent interviews, which are spread over two afternoons and evenings to maximise opportunities for parents to attend. There are many and varied opportunities for parents and the school to engage in activities which create greater mutual understanding.

The school was bulk funded for teachers' salaries until the change in government funding policy. The principal said that the school now receives less than it did under the bulk funding policy, and considers it was "hard hit" financially when bulk funding of teachers' salaries stopped.

The school was selected because of its reputation as a "dynamic and vibrant learning community" (ERO report, 1998) and because the school is acknowledged by other principals as one which continues to improve over time. We interviewed the principal in the first phase of our study, and we thought it would be worthwhile to see how her educational philosophies are enacted in practice in her school.

In this school we interviewed the principal, the deputy principal (who was the literacy leader), the assistant principal, five classroom teachers (one of whom was the science leader), the chair of the board of trustees, the office manager, and a teacher's aide.

Changes to the school have been gradual. In recent years the range of ethnic groups attending the school has widened and the school roll has increased. The school consistently receives positive ERO reports because of its provision of high-quality education, steady and ongoing efforts to look critically at school practices, openness to improving opportunities available to teachers and children, and enlightened, stable, and focused management and leadership. The principal was appointed 12 years ago, and the senior management team has worked well together for several years. Teachers considered that the school has a "good mix" of experienced and newly qualified teachers, and observed that the core of experienced teachers provided solidity and strength, balanced with the freshness and enthusiasm of recent graduates. Last year there were no staff changes. One teacher claimed that "Schools with lots of staff changes—they're forever having to start things all over again."

The team shares co-constructivist and empowering views on learning, a commitment to bringing out the best in others, and a willingness to challenge and be challenged. Staff are encouraged to participate broadly in education, including agreement to short periods of leave to allow them to contribute to literacy development ventures run by a New Zealand company in the USA.

The key factors which seemed to contribute to the success of this school were:

- commitment to children and to their learning;
- participation in the Strengthening Education in Mangere and Otara (SEMO) initiative;
- effective educational leadership and management;
- focused professional development.

Commitment to Children and to Their Learning

The school's determination that all children will enjoy their schooling and be successful is reflected in all aspects of school organisation, policies, and practices.

The principal stressed that all children have the right to the:

> best education possible. We teach them that nothing is impossible and to reach for the stars and we try to give them the skills and the self-belief to do that. The emphasis has changed from education to get a job. Now they have to develop independence in learning and want to keep learning all their lives.

She spoke about ensuring that all students have access to the kinds of teaching that supports their learning and allows them to have choices and options when they grow up. Children are valued and cherished: "Children are first and foremost. They have input into everything. It's their school and their classrooms. They know that, they know that they are valued," said one teacher. Teachers spoke of "wanting the best for each child" and emphasised that "every child matters". "We understand that everyone is capable of learning, and we don't give up on anyone."

Comments from children indicated that they are well aware that they are important to the teachers, and that the school seeks the best for them. One student wrote, "I like how the teachers try their best so us kids get a good education," and another stated, "When I come here in the morning I look forward to the things that we're going to do in school time."

Several teachers told us that enjoyment of the children was the aspect of their job that they enjoyed most. "It's the mixture of the kind of kids that we have here. They love coming to school. There are some little rascals but they are really neat kids."

As well as stressing high academic expectations, teachers believe it is important that children learn the social and interpersonal skills that will allow them to work co-operatively with others and to "get along with other people". The principal emphasised that the school also has a social responsibility to help children take responsibility for themselves and their actions. Children are expected to demonstrate "good manners" and treat every person in the school with dignity and respect. To ensure that the whole school had common expectations for behaviour, teachers initially identified the behavioural expectations that they wished to foster, and these are continually modelled, taught about, and reinforced. Staff told us about the courteous peer relationships they have fostered. Children reported that "kids are friendly and play nicely with each other", and that "most of the school are good and never get into any fights". Children are expected to greet and address teachers by their correct names when they meet them in the corridors and playground, and it is expected that all staff will make efforts to recognise and respond to children around the school. A teacher told us that the last two ERO reports noted the positive teacher/teacher, teacher/student, and student/student interactions in the school. A statement by a Year 4 student sums up the supportive ethos well:

> I like this school because last year I started school on February and no-one was unkind they were all doing their own things, they help me when I'm lonely, I mean that's what friends are for. I think this school deserves something, this school is wonderful.

Another initiative which fosters supportive learning contexts between children is the school's "read to" programme. Older fluent readers are paired with new entrants during their first term at school for daily reading. The school has purchased additional copies of school readers, and older children select a book to read to their buddy after the first break. The older student then ensures that the book is placed in a special book bag to be taken home and shared with parents. This is one component of the overall literacy strategy. Evaluation of the programme indicates that the experience of reading aloud regularly with a responsive younger child has improved relationships between younger and older children, and helped the older children to become more responsible. This finding has been reported in other studies where older students work with younger children (Cameron and Walker, 1994).

During a study tour where the principal and deputy principal visited schools in other countries, they began to question the traditional structure of the school day in New Zealand. Two years ago, the timetable was changed to give teachers and children longer blocks of time to engage in sustained learning. This approach was initially trialled and then instituted, following the results of a survey of staff, parents, and groups of children, as follows:

School Timetable

Before 9.00 am	Fitness sessions
9.00 am – 10.50 am	First teaching session
10.50 am – 11.00 am	Break for food
11.00 am – 11.30 am	Recess
11.30 am – 1.20 pm	Second teaching session
1.20 pm – 1.30 pm	Break for food
1.30 pm – 2.00 pm	Recess
2.00 pm – 3.00 pm	Third teaching session

Teachers consider that the rearranged schedule allows much more work to be accomplished, and that children are much more alert, particularly in the second session. One teacher commented:

> I use my middle block for reading and writing. Before I couldn't get finished before the break, I'd have to stop them and they'd lose momentum. Now I can spend a good 40 minutes reading and writing and doing oral language. Doing it properly and not just whizzing through the groups.

Problems in the playground appear to be minimal and "children come inside in a much better frame of mind, not hungry" (principal).

The philosophy of the school supports the belief that all children have unique skills, talents and capabilities, and that it is the role of the school to identify and nurture these abilities. Staff also see their role as endeavouring to assist children to become independent learners from the start of their education. Teachers talked about a "child-centred" approach to learning, which was defined as tailoring learning so that it is right for each child, and teaching in contexts that are meaningful to children. For example, the science curriculum leader told us how children grew seeds, and ground up wheat to make bread, after reading the story of the little red hen.

The child-centred approach requires that all children have access to learning that is at the right instructional level, as well as the support to allow them to achieve. The Special Needs team meets regularly to ensure that children's learning needs are being addressed. Perhaps the most effective contribution is the provision of specific and targeted classroom teaching, particularly when children are beginning learners. However, teachers also need additional support to assist them to teach some children. There are now six teacher's aides who work with individual children in classrooms to help them to meet curriculum goals, and who also work with small groups of children with identified needs. Evaluation of progress made by individual children who have participated in these programmes shows that all have made gains, some of them substantial. Careful tracking of individual children's progress ensures that no-one slips through the cracks.

The school also caters for children with special abilities, primarily by teaching programmes which allow for exploration and extension, and also by hosting a "one day school" for children who have been identified as having special abilities in particular areas.

Until changes in the National Administration Guidelines (NAGs), teachers found it difficult to address all aspects of the New Zealand curriculum, while also focusing on literacy and numeracy skills. The changes in the NAGS, which allow schools to keep their focus on learning key literacy and numeracy skills, have gone some way to reducing the demands of the mandated curriculum.

Teachers previously "worried" about fitting everything in and sometimes "fretted" about the time that this took from what they saw as their most important functions. They are relieved that their concerns have been legitimated by the change to the NAGs. Teachers are also attempting to integrate curriculum areas by addressing several areas in planning, teaching, and assessing programmes of work. The intention is to design more connected learning experiences by addressing achievement objectives from several curriculum areas in a particular unit of work.

Another strategy that teachers are using to ensure that they have sufficient time to devote to learning is to cut down on outside interruptions to their programmes.

One teacher pointed out that, "In the past there seemed so much to get done. Now we can say that for two or three weeks a term there will be no outside things or extra things, so teachers can just concentrate on teaching."

Participation in the Strengthening Education in Mangere and Otara (SEMO) Initiative

In our discussions with staff, we noted several references to school practices which have grown out of projects which were initially funded by the Ministry of Education's Strengthening Education in Mangere and Otara (SEMO) initiative. Participation in SEMO has strengthened several aspects of school management for this school, particularly in the literacy area. For example, in 2000, the school participated in the Ministry of Education's Early Childhood Primary Links via Literacy (ECPL) project. This project aimed to improve children's literacy achievement by enhancing the work of early childhood and primary teachers in their literacy programmes, and improving the links, expectations, and information between early childhood education centres, parents, and schools. The project involved a professional development programme undertaken over 20 weeks with staff in early childhood education centres and primary schools. It aimed to change teachers' beliefs about language, learning, and literacy, and involved intensive teaching and analysis. There were some combined early childhood and primary professional development sessions. An evaluation of the ECPL project by Phillips, McNaughton, and MacDonald (2002) showed some higher scores on literacy and language measures for children whose teachers had been in the early childhood or primary interventions, and some further benefits for students whose teachers had been in the combined early childhood and primary intervention.

Pikitia School now has a transition to school programme which supports the transition from early childhood education centres into the first year of school.

Firstly, the school actively attempts to identify likely enrolments so that these children and their families can be targeted for pre-entry activities and events. Teachers ask parents for names of siblings who may be attending, and links with local early childhood centres encourage contact with prospective parents.

All prospective parents are contacted by phone and sent written invitations to a coffee morning held once a term. The coffee mornings include opportunities to observe classrooms in action, and informal discussions about school practices, and how parents can support their children's learning at home. This includes information on reading and telling stories with children, talking with children, and helping them to write their name. Sometimes parents stay for a shared lunch. Parents are also informed about preschool library sessions that are held every Wednesday morning. There is also a daily before school time slot where junior class teachers are rostered to be in the library to share books, games, and toys with families. There is now a parent education collection in the school library for parents to borrow from.

In term 4 last year, the Wonderful Wednesday library sessions were advertised in the school foyer as including "Eyespy with Mrs X", "Shapes with Mrs T", "Pirates", "Computer Fun", and "The Jungle". Teachers are released from 9.00 am to 10.30 am to offer children and their families "a stimulating literacy morning".

The junior teachers and small groups of children visit local early childhood education centres, and these visits are reciprocal. This allows teachers in both settings to learn more about their respective programmes, and to share information about children's needs and learning. It also helps the early childhood children to develop familiarity with school settings, and get to know some of the teachers and children with whom they will be working.

The school offers orientation to school sessions for three Thursdays preceding entry to school. Parents are welcome to stay for these sessions until they feel confident that their child feels secure in the classroom. This provides another opportunity for parents and teachers to talk with each other, and build relationships which encourage closer links between home and school. Parenting classes have been available for parents in the past, and the schools plans to offer them again when funding is secured.

The school has also reassessed its attitudes to learning approaches for new entrant children, following the SEMO professional development initiative to strengthen their literacy practices in the first year of schooling.

Before their involvement in the SEMO project, teachers believed that children needed time to settle into school before formal learning was begun. Now, according to the principal, "They hit the ground running the day they arrive. There is no time to waste. We do developmental type activities plus teaching." Another teacher told us that they "crank up the learning as well as developmental". She reported that "Children are given a pen and a book and a book bag on the day they start and are told that they are writers and readers."

Teachers also spoke of shifting their perspectives on the knowledge that children bring to school, and coming to value their previous learning. "Every child comes to school with prior knowledge. The school's job is to accept their culture, belief system, and prior knowledge and build on it." One teacher commented that "Some people say, 'These children come to school with nothing.' There's no way they come to school with nothing. They know how to change a nappy, to buy bread at the shop. We have to build on what they are good at."

Expectations for children's learning have increased. One teacher told us how "We expect them to do their best and I know what they can do so I push them. If I know that they know how to write a word they are expected to do it again next time. It puts responsibility on them for their own learning." She also said that teachers "push kids to their limits more than we did in terms of feedback on their work." Another teacher commented that while she was aware that children achieved at different levels, each child was expected to improve and to demonstrate progress. She acknowledged that the SEMO project had impacted on her teaching and the way that she thought about children. Another teacher attributed the fact that she now had much higher numbers of children reading at or above their chronological age to the work done by teachers as a result of SEMO.

It appears that the impact of the SEMO initiative has been significant, and that the insights and skills gained are now part of the school's accepted belief system and approach to learning.

Effective Educational Leadership and Management

Improvements in this school have been spearheaded and encouraged by sound processes of school governance and management. The board of trustees consists of parents and community members with long-term links with the school. The board chair has grandchildren at the school, and his daughter serves on the Parent Teacher Association. The board chair sees his role primarily as one of oversight. He believes that every school is different, and the role of the board will be different in different situations. In some cases the board will be more fully involved, but in the case of this school, "We are very hands off, but very aware." He commented that while the board does not get involved in the professional management of the school, it "makes sure it is professionally run" and "endeavours to keep a watching brief to see how things are going" and that "It is fundamental to make sure that the kids are taught properly." Roles and responsibilities are clear and the partnership appears mutually supportive. In his view the school meets its responsibilities to its students very well, and therefore "We are either very fortunate or very successful."

Teachers identified effective leadership and management as one of the strengths of this school. They consider that the board performs its functions well, is part of the school, and that the senior leadership team shares a common philosophy and a united approach to their work in the school. Teachers made comments such as "there's a school-wide unity with everyone working on the same wavelength" and suggested that the total school environment reflected the whole school philosophy. They reported an ongoing emphasis on seeking ways to do things better, which they experienced as professionally satisfying.

Staff derive enjoyment from the collegial approach, which is constantly modelled and encouraged. Several described their work as stimulating. They reported that outsiders, such as student teachers, frequently give them positive feedback about the friendly staff relationships, the attractive visual environment, and the welcome that they experience from children and staff.

Teachers referred to the support that was available to them. New staff are inducted into school systems, and the support for beginning teachers is thoroughly planned and systematic.

They also consider that the work they do is appreciated and valued. One teacher told us that at least twice a year, the principal meets individually with each teacher to check how things are going for them, and to identify aspects of their work that she particularly values. Staff are given flowers in appreciation of extra effort, and there is a "thank you" book in the staffroom where staff acknowledge the efforts of others. As a result, teachers report that they enjoy their work: "I love my work. Not one day in 8 years have I woken up and not wanted to go to work. Not one."

Systems of performance management were viewed favourably by teachers. Teachers are appraised twice yearly by a member of the senior management team and a colleague of their choice. The first appraisal session is for a full morning, and teachers are able to request feedback on aspects of their teaching. Teachers report that they enjoy having two colleagues watch their teaching and consider that it provides an opportunity for sharing ideas and discussing their work.

Focused Professional Development

Like the other schools in this study, Pikitia School has invested significantly in professional development for all staff. Where possible, the school prefers to be involved in whole school development. In 2000 the major focus was action research and learning linked with information and communications technology. All staff have now completed the Infolink course to assist them to teach in ways which promote investigative approaches to learning, and the construction of meaningful learning. This contributes to consistent approaches to teaching and learning across the school.

As discussed earlier, the opportunities provided by SEMO have had a lasting impact on the ways teachers think about their students, their partnerships with parents, and their teaching practices.

There is provision within the budget for teachers to attend national conferences; as well as providing access to new research, this allows them to make contacts with colleagues in other parts of the country.

Some teachers have been granted leave to travel to the USA to contribute to teaching American teachers about effective literacy programmes. A teacher with 8 years' experience described how she worked in 6 schools, and gave demonstration lessons to teachers who were startled at the amount that she could achieve with their students. She found this experience was professionally very rewarding and challenging, as it required her to think deeply about the rationale for her teaching practices in order to communicate it to others:

> It was an amazing confidence booster. I've been teaching 8 years and the amount I've learned and am learning is amazing compared with teachers over there. Having to verbalise and explain all the things we do automatically. Having to think about why I do things and explain it to others. . . .

Her experience highlights the professional benefits of sharing and discussing actual practice with others. In her case, having to articulate practices that are part of a shared and taken for granted approach to literacy teaching helped to move her knowledge from the tacit to the explicit. Regular opportunities for in-class observation and discussion of teaching would appear to have considerable potential for internal staff development and improvement of pedagogy.

Other professional development thrusts occur in response to school identified needs. As part of the Ministry of Education's Literacy Leadership contract, the school created a school vision for literacy, with associated goals and timeframes.

The focus for professional development in 2001 was written language. The school employed a consultant to facilitate a professional development programme across the school, with the goal of creating improvement in children's writing, and stronger links between reading and writing.

It was intended that linking the teaching of reading and writing would help students to become more aware of their roles as writers and readers, and able to talk about the process of writing, as well as the writing itself. Another purpose was for students to become more intentional about using strategies gained in reading and writing in other curriculum areas, and for them to be more able to shape writing according to its purpose. A related goal was to increase accuracy and editing skills. Teachers aimed to develop strategies to create better specificity in teaching and assessment of written language.

The professional development began with an introductory staff meeting taken by the consultant, followed by groups of teachers observing and discussing the consultant's modelling of shared and guided writing lessons. These lessons illustrated ways of talking through the processes of constructing text. Features of the pedagogy were explicit intentional teaching, and questioning of children which required thinking rather than recall.

Teachers tried out these approaches in their own classrooms, with the consultant providing feedback. Teachers then demonstrated for their peers.

Parents were encouraged to attend a literacy curriculum evening, which explained the programme, and newsletters to parents included samples of children's writing with explanations of progress.

At the beginning of the programme, teachers identified exemplars of high, middle, and low achievers for each class level to provide a basis for evaluation of the programme. Evaluation showed that teachers were now better able to target children at risk of not succeeding in reading and writing, and to provide them with the intentional teaching they needed. Results on the 6 year net show a rise in reading levels and in numbers of words written. The focus for 2002 is the improvement of writing across the school.

Teachers discovered that they needed to lift their expectations for writing as well as for reading. One teacher told us:

> I'd been doing it in the reading but not in the writing. I now make better links between reading and writing. We'll be doing writing while we're reading. If we're reading a book on tarantulas, we might write down interesting words about them.

She also reported that writing now has more of a purpose:

> If we are reading about fishing off the wharf they might write a letter to their parents saying why they want to go fishing. There's no more "yesterday I went to the shops" kind of writing.

One of the teachers who participated in the programme was selected by the local college of education to model her teaching of writing for an educational video. She told us that by having a stimulating literature programme, children will apply those ideas in their own writing, if they are shown how. She believes that her students are now highly motivated, as she has been able to create an environment where children's writing is shared, critiqued, and evaluated.

Students' Views

A class of senior students was asked to complete a questionnaire relating to their experiences of school.

Because some children were engaged in other projects and 26 of the class members were Year 4 children, only 11 Years 5 and 6 students returned completed questionnaires. All students said that they usually have good friends and that they never feel lonely. Most students reported that they usually do interesting things at school, that the rules are fair, and that teachers treat them fairly. They consider that they can learn what they need for their future, that they enjoy themselves, and that teachers tell them when they do good work. Half consider that they sometimes get upset and 4 report that they are sometimes bullied.

Five Years 5 and 6 children identified the commitment of teachers to their education as what they liked best about the school. There were also frequent references to enjoyment of reading, writing, maths, and art (13), and enjoying relationships with peers. One child identified the "big children to stick up for me".

Six children wrote that they would change nothing about the school and others suggested some improvements, such as new rugby goal posts, and toilets attached to classrooms.

The statement which received the highest agreement among the 26 Year 4 students was "I try hard at school". Students considered that they mostly liked this school (20), and that their teacher was fair to them (20). Two-thirds noted that their teachers were mostly kind to them, and told them when they did good work. Only a third thought that their classmates usually behaved well, and only 10 mostly felt safe in the playground. Despite the school's emphasis on supportive peer relationships, 12 children felt safe in the playground only sometimes, and 3 said they never or hardly ever felt safe.

The aspect of their school that these children liked best was learning. Sixteen comments identify "work", "learning", or curriculum subjects as most enjoyed. Reading is the curriculum area singled out most often (4). Teachers (6) and friends (6) are referred to next.

Sixteen children left the section on changes blank; like the older students, Year 4 suggestions for change referred mostly to improving the playground facilities—for example, 3 children wanted the swimming pool to be heated.

Teachers' Views

Profile of Teachers Who Completed Surveys

Sex	Female	15
	Male	3
Position	Classroom teacher	15
	AD/DP	1
	Senior teacher	2
Years of teaching experience	Less than 2	4
	2–4 years	2
	5–10 years	5
	11–20 years	5
	21 plus years	2
Years at Pikitia School	Less than 2	4
	2–4 years	7
	5–10 years	5
	11–20 years	2
	21 plus years	

Qualifications	Diploma of Teaching (15), Bachelor of Arts (6), Bachelor of Education (3), Higher Diploma of Teaching and Advanced Diploma of Teaching, Primary Teachers' Certificate
Membership of professional organisations	NZEI (7), Region's Primary Teachers' Art Association, Region's Reading Association (2)

The statements on which the 18 teachers who returned the survey accorded their highest levels of agreement were those relating to student learning. Teachers strongly agreed with the statement that teachers regularly discuss ways of improving student learning (16), and that students are encouraged to become independent learners (13). This illustrates their collaborative and analytic approach to learning. Twelve teachers agreed strongly that teachers believe that all students can learn and can be successful, and that students are treated with respect and encouraged to do their best.

Teachers all agreed that students are enthusiastic learners. Some staff were equivocal about how well the school communicated to parents the standard of work it expects from students.

Teachers strongly agreed that senior staff are available to discuss curriculum and teaching matters (15), that new staff are well supported in the school (12), and that colleagues will help them when they have problems (12).

Teachers clearly believe that leadership and management is effective, and that there is a strong academic emphasis in the school.

The items on which there was a measure of uncertainty or disagreement relate to staff and student involvement in strategic planning, and staff involvement in important decision-making. In a large school, not all teachers will necessarily be in accord with each other in every area.

Table 5 shows teachers' levels of agreement to a range of statements about school changes over the last 3–4 years. Six teachers had been at the school for less than this period, and selected "don't know" on many of the items. The majority of teachers indicated that the biggest change was that they now expected more from their students. They were unequivocal about this. They also agreed that they had made positive changes to the way they taught and to the way the school is run. A number of teachers also thought that student behaviour had improved (11), that there was more acknowledgment of children's cultures (8), and that more use was made of te reo Māori (10).

Seven teachers identified improvements in literacy teaching and learning as the most significant achievement over the past 3–4 years, and 5 considered that the relevance and quality of staff development has been important. Three identified the SEMO project, and 3 the integrated curriculum developments, as being significant changes.

Strengths of the school were identified as communication and teamwork across the school (18 comments). Thirteen teachers commented on the quality of teaching programmes and learning environments, and 5 referred to the focus on children and their learning.

There was no pattern to teachers' suggestions for improvement, apart from 2 teachers who suggested that class sizes be smaller, 2 who desired further efforts to improve transition between early childhood centres and intermediate schools, and 2 who wanted the junior students to be able to participate in cultural events.

Other suggestions made by single individuals were:

- more cohesive and focused staff development;
- more delegation from senior staff with associated time allowance;
- more staff involvement in decision making;
- greater emphasis on teaching and assessing skills;
- more dance and drama;
- having an on site early childhood centre;
- creating a middle school;
- improving teacher access to the photocopier;
- teachers having their own classroom budgets.

Support Staff Views

Profile of Support Staff Who Completed Surveys

Sex	Female	5
	Male	1
Position	Teacher's aide	2
	Deputy librarian	1
	Office manager	1
	Office assistant	1
	Caretaker cleaner	1
Years at Pikitia School	Less than 2	2
	2–4 years	
	5–10 years	3
	11–20 years	1
	21 plus years	
Qualifications	NZIM Supervisory Certificate and GCE Levels, Higher Teacher Aide Certificate (2), Teacher Aide Certificate and National Library Certificate, UE	
Membership of professional organisations	Diving Instructors' organisation (PADI), NZEI	

Six support staff completed the questionnaire, 2 of whom had been at the school less than 2 years. There was strongest agreement with the statement that children's cultures were acknowledged more, and that te reo Māori was used more. Six support staff considered that expectations for student learning were higher.

Four support staff commented on recent achievements. All referred to improvements in learning and teaching with a particular emphasis on literacy.

The quality of staff was seen as the school's greatest strength, including the commitment to children's learning.

Only 2 support staff commented on changes, and both stressed that the school roll should not get any bigger.

Summary

There are many features of this school which have contributed to its trajectory of steady improvement over time.

The central distinguishing characteristic of the school is educational leadership which is steadfastly focused on learning. These leadership practices have led to the establishment of a community of learners which is constantly reviewing its practices, asking questions about how things could be improved, and working towards productive improvement.

The school has a strong emphasis on both social and academic learning. A learning environment has been built up which reinforces mutually supportive relationships among students, between students and teachers, among teachers, and with the school community.

There was a strong sense that this community had been built to support its members emotionally and intellectually. Students know that their teachers care about them, and are appreciative of their commitment. Staff support each other in ways which create a collective sense of personal and professional well-being, as well as a shared responsibility for student learning. The culture seemed strong and cohesive enough to carry further improvements. Emphasis on students' learning was guarded, e.g., by organising time to enable students to have sustained periods of concentration.

The school has benefited from its participation in several professional development initiatives, which have strengthened its partnership with its community, and enhanced teaching and learning in classrooms.

Expectations for student achievement have been raised, and there is an emphasis on focused teaching strategies which both support and challenge students.

While much of this improvement can be attributed to the leadership of the principal and her senior management team, leadership opportunities are dispersed across the school, thus ensuring that the capacity for effective school management and curriculum and professional development leadership is enhanced.

This suggests that the responsibility for school performance is not totally reliant upon the efforts of one or two individuals, as other staff are mentored to learn leadership skills. This seems to be central to the notion of a professional learning community.

Table 3

Years 5–6 Students' Views of Their Experience at School (n=11)

School is a place where	Mostly	Sometimes	Never/hardly ever
I like my teachers	11		
I have good friends	11		
I do interesting things	10	1	
Teachers treat me fairly	10	1	
The rules are fair	10	1	
I can learn what I need for the future	9	2	
My teacher tells me when I do good work	9	2	
I enjoy myself	9	2	
Teachers help me to improve my work	7	4	
I could do better work if I tried	7	2	2
Teachers listen to what I say	7	4	
I keep out of trouble	6	4	1
Teachers explain things clearly to me	6	5	
I get all the help I need	6	5	
I learn most things pretty quickly	4	7	
I feel safe in the playground	3	7	1
I get tired of trying	2	6	3
Students behave well in class	1	10	
I get a hard time	1	1	9
I get bored	1	3	7
I feel restless		6	5
I get upset		5	6
I get bullied		4	7
I feel lonely		1	10

Table 4

Year 4 Students' Views of Their Experience at School (n=26)

School is a place where	Mostly	Sometimes	Never/hardly ever	No response
I try hard at school	22	4		
I belong in this school	21	2	2	1
I like my school	20	5	1	
My teacher is fair to me	20	6		
My teacher is kind to me	16	8		2
My teacher tells me when I do good work	16	10		
I like my work	14	8	1	3
My teacher helps me to do better work	14	7	1	4
I feel safe in the playground	10	12	3	1
Children in my class behave well	9	14	3	

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Table 5

Teachers' Views of Their School (n=18)

The school now	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
Teachers regularly discuss ways of improving students' learning	16	2		
Senior staff are available to discuss curriculum/teaching matters	15	3		
Teachers encourage students to be independent learners	13	5		
Students' work is prominently displayed	13	4	1	
Teachers respect students	12	6		
Staff encourage students to try their best	12	6		
New staff are well supported in this school	12	4	2	
Teachers regularly monitor the learning and progress of individual children	12	5	1	
The primary concern of everyone in the school is student learning	12	6		
If staff have a problem with their teaching they usually turn to colleagues for help	12	5	1	
Teachers in this school believe that all students can be successful	12	6		
Teachers in this school believe that all students can learn	12	6		
Staff in this school work hard to promote and maintain good relations with the community	10	6	2	
Teachers like working in the school	10	8		
Senior staff openly recognise teachers when they do things well	10	8		
Students are clear about standards of behaviour expected in the school	10	7	1	
Students respect teachers	9	7	2	
There is mutual respect between staff and senior staff in this school	9	6	3	
There is effective communication between senior staff and teachers	9	5	1	3
Staff ensure that students receive constructive feedback about their work	8	7	3	
Whole school meetings are worthwhile	8	9	1	
Teachers regularly collaborate to plan their teaching	8	9	1	
Adults (teachers) as well as students learn in this school	8	9	1	
Student success is regularly celebrated in this school	8	5	3	2
The board of trustees plays a significant role in supporting developments within the school	8	7	2	1
The school allows staff joint planning time	7	9	2	
Staff feel encouraged to bring forward new ideas	7	8	3	
Every attempt is made to set challenging standards of achievement for each student	7	11		
Non-teaching staff feel involved in the life of the school	7	6	5	
The staff encourage parents to be involved in the school	7	8	2	1
There is effective communication among teachers	6	12		
Expectations about school work are communicated clearly to all students	6	9	3	
Teachers regularly observe each other in the classroom and give each other feedback	6	9		3
Staff development time is used effectively in the school	6	9	2	1
Students in this school are enthusiastic about learning	6	12		
Staff have a commitment to the whole school and not just their class or syndicate	6	11		1
Teachers share similar beliefs and attitudes about effective teaching/learning	6	11	1	
Disruption in classes is dealt with promptly so that learning for all students can proceed	6	10	2	
Teachers pay attention to keeping the school environment attractive	5	13		
Decision-making processes are fair	4	7	5	2
The senior staff communicate a clear vision of where the school is going	4	10	3	1
Parents are clear about behaviour standards expected in school	4	10	3	1
There is regular staff discussion about how to achieve school goals and targets	3	14	1	
Standards set for students are consistently upheld across the school	3	8	7	
The school development plan includes practical ways of evaluating success in achieving goals and targets	3	10	4	1
Teachers have a say in topics selected for the school's staff development programme	2	6	7	3
At staff meetings time is spent on important things rather than on minor issues	2	10	4	2
Non-teaching staff have input into the school strategic plan	2	1	13	2
Extra curricular activities provide valuable opportunities for all students	2	11	3	2
Staff participate in important decision making	1	10	4	3
The school communicates clearly to parents the standard of work it expects from students	1	12	5	
Teachers have a say in the school strategic plan	1	9	6	2
Students have some say in the school strategic plan	1	3	8	6

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Table 6

Teachers' Views of Change Over Last 3–4 Years (n=18)

Change over the last 3–4 years	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Don't know
We expect more of our students	6	8			4
We have made positive changes to the way the school runs	5	5	4		4
We have made positive changes to how we plan ahead	5	4	2	2	5
We have made positive changes to the way we teach	5	8			5
We monitor our progress more	5	4	3	1	5
We have more professional development	4	4	4	2	4
We acknowledge children's cultures more	3	5	5	1	4
We make more use of te reo Māori	3	7	3	1	4
Student behaviour has improved	2	9	2	1	4
We enjoy our work more	1	6	2	2	7
Parents show more interest in their children's learning		4	6	3	5
We have more contact with other schools		2	6	6	4

Table 7

Support Staff Views of Their School (n=6)

The school now	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	No response
Teachers respect students	6				
Students' work is prominently displayed	6				
Staff encourage students to try their very best	5	1			
The staff encourage parents to be involved in the school	5				1
Students are clear about standards of behaviour expected in the school	5	1			
Teachers in this school believe that all students can learn	5	1			
Teachers believe that all children can be successful	4	2			
Staff have a commitment to the whole school and not just their class or syndicate	4		1		1
Senior staff openly recognise support staff when they do things well	4	2			
Student success is regularly celebrated in this school	4	2			
Staff pay attention to keeping the school environment attractive	3	2	1		
Teachers in this school believe that all students can be successful	3	3			
The board of trustees plays a significant role in supporting developments with the school	3	2			1
Staff in this school work hard to promote and maintain good relations with the community	2	3			1
The primary concern of everyone in the school is student learning	2	4			
The senior staff communicate a clear vision of where the school is going	2	3			1
Support staff like working in this school	2	4			
Disruption in classes is dealt with promptly so that learning for all students can proceed	2	3			1
Whole school meetings are worthwhile	1	2	1		1
There is mutual respect between staff and senior staff in this school	1	4	1		
The school communicates clearly to parents the standard of work it expects from students	1	4			1
Adults as well as students learn in this school	1	4			1
Standards set for students are consistently upheld across the school	1	3	1		1
Support staff have input into the school strategic plan	1	3		1	1
Extra-curricular activities provide valuable opportunities for all students	1	4			1
There is effective communication among staff		5			1
Students respect staff		5			1
There is effective communication between teachers and support staff		5		1	
Parents are clear about behaviour standards expected in the school		5			1
Students in this school are enthusiastic about learning		5			1
There is regular staff discussion about how to achieve school goals/targets		5			1
Decision-making processes are fair		4	1		1
Staff feel encouraged to bring forward new ideas		4	1		1
Staff development time is used effectively in the school		4			2
Support staff feel involved in the life of the school		4	1		1
The school development plan includes practical ways of evaluating success in achieving goals and targets		4			2
Staff participate in important decision making		3	2		1
At staff meetings time is spent on important things rather than on minor issues		2	2		2

Table 8

Support Staff Views of Changes in the Last 3–4 Years (n=6)

Change over the last 3–4 years	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Don't know
We acknowledge children's cultures more	3	2			1
We have made positive changes to the way the school runs	2	3			1
We have more professional development	2	3			1
We have made positive changes to the way we teach	2	2			2
We make more use of te reo Māori	2	2	1		1
We monitor our progress more	1	4			1
We enjoy our work more	1	4			1
We expect more of our students	1	5			
We have made positive changes to how we plan ahead	1	4			1
Student behaviour has improved	1	3			2
Parents show more interest in their children's learning		4	1		1
We have more contact with other schools		2	3		1

RICO SCHOOL

Introduction

Rico School Profile

School type	Contributing primary
Roll size	304
Decile rating	2
Locality	Suburban
Student ethnicity	Pākehā – 61%
	Māori – 30%
	Samoan – 3%
	Other – 6%
Staffing entitlement	14.2 plus 1
Actual staffing	16 full-time, 2 part-time
Release time	0.2 deputy principal release from entitlement staffing 0.2 assistant principal release from operational funding
Recommended	By ERO and Ministry of Education as "a good school getting better" and "consistently good".

Rico School is situated in a low-income suburban community with several other primary schools: a recapitated full primary which has a total immersion class, a contributing primary school, a state integrated contributing primary school, and an intermediate school. The area is defined geographically by hills leading down to a bay, and most students attend a local school. This configuration is important, because the changes each school makes, such as the recapitation of one primary school in 2000, have an impact on the other schools. Some parents at Rico School would like it to be capitated too, and this will be considered in an area review of Years 7 and 8 education.

Compared with Rico, the full primary school in the area in 1998 had 68 percent Māori, 23 percent Pākehā and 9 percent Pasifika students. These differences are not surprising, given the full primary school's emphasis on immersion education. These figures indicate the way in which schools in the area are working out a "niche" for themselves in respect to special features of their education, and the nature of the student group that they attract. The principal calls Rico School the "middle-class school" of the area.

As well as the 0.2 release for the deputy principal from entitlement staffing, the assistant principal has 0.2 release from operational funding for Māori language classes and release time. There are a school secretary, an office assistant, 2 teacher aides, a caretaker, and 2 cleaners.

Recently, substantial work has been done on school buildings and grounds. There was a school fire two years ago, and two classrooms were burned down. These were relocatable classrooms and were replaced. A new administration block was built in 2000. Classrooms have been carpeted. Grounds have been improved. "Shade houses" and seating have been built on the initiative of the board of trustees to provide protection from the sun. The board has also carried out a planting project. There is a playcentre in one corner of the grounds.

Rico School was recommended by several people as a school that had been consistently "good" over a period of time. According to an ERO official, it is "a good school, getting better".

We interviewed the board of trustees chair, the principal, the literacy leader, who is also the deputy principal, the science leader, the assistant principal, a senior teacher, a beginning teacher, the school secretary, the office assistant, and a group of 4 parents.

There was an air of optimism and intense interest in the work of teaching and learning, as teachers used release time, lunch time, and staff meeting time to talk about students, achievement results, ideas, and directions. We heard teachers' willingness to work with other schools and learn from others. It was common practice for teachers to work together to observe and analyse teaching practice, examine student achievement, plan and collaborate with each other, and sometimes use outside professional support to deepen their understanding of teaching and learning. Five features stood out as contributing to the school's development and performance:

- the reflective culture of the school;
- the energy of staff;
- the way in which skills were used to strengthen teaching in all curriculum areas;
- the provision of a safe and healthy environment;
- the role played by the board of trustees to provide a solid base for school operations;
- initiation of linkages with other schools, health, welfare and community organisations especially to support student learning and well-being.

We heard about how external policies and practices impact on the school. We had an impression of a confident school that takes on challenges and changes with assurance, and has done this for many years.

School Ethos and Values

The school philosophy is described in the information booklet, as follows:

> Our first priority is to give children a solid grounding in the basic literacy, oracy and numeracy skills. Our second priority is to build on that foundation, providing activities that will challenge and stimulate children. We want our children to leave with:
>
> - positive attitudes about themselves and others
> - good interpersonal skills
> - and the ability to operate successfully in the modern world.

All staff emphasised that the school values literacy: "If you can read and write, the door is open to you" (senior teacher). Numeracy, health, and PE were other curriculum areas that were especially singled out. Some also noted the school's commitment to skills for active, long-term learning and social skills. "In detail, giving them skills to be academics, to research information, to solve problems and to question. This is more than just teaching them to read and write. Also to have a social commitment. They are part of society and have roles and responsibilities to class, school, and community." (assistant principal)

According to the board chair, these values have been present for a long time and have been built on. He said that a key to their development is the "empowering way" in which the school works, and the belief that every child can learn. "If there's a mistake, that's okay." The assistant principal also commented on the "empowering" approach taken with students. "School values were developed through a lot of discussion. A shift in believing not 'Poor Sarah. I'll give her a cuddle' but 'Let's give her a cuddle, feed her, give her skills she can use'."

The "empowering" approach is also evident in the school's approach to teaching and learning, behaviour management, and teacher development.

The School's Reflective Culture

> Once you'd have walked into the staff room and the talk would have been about the weekend. Now we talk about work, about children and teaching. (assistant principal)

Significant change in this school in the last 3–4 years appears to be a strengthening of its reflective culture, collaboration between teachers, and a sharp focus on analysis, action, and evaluation to improve student achievement. This is most evident in its work on literacy, where the school has been part of the Ministry of Education's Literacy Enhancement project, but teacher analysis of student work and their own pedagogical knowledge and teaching, discussion, collective planning, and school-wide action are evident in most areas of curriculum work.

In literacy, the first aspect to be critically examined and addressed was the school's work with students with reading difficulties. The school's literacy leader said that the high number of students requiring Reading Recovery programmes had pinpointed the need for students to gain a higher level of reading skills early in their schooling. She arranged for an education consultant to run two workshops for all the staff, and this revealed several important things:

- Teachers did not all have the skills to analyse students' reading skills.
- Long and short vowels were not being taught in the classroom.
- Students were scoring low on the 6 year net writing vocabulary assessment for "recording of words". However, after a visit and discussion with teachers in another school, the literacy leader realised that the school was administering the 6 year net wrongly, so that students were scoring lower than their actual level. Clear instructions were not given, so administration of the assessment was open to interpretation.
- Students' reading scores depended on what book was being used.

Consideration of these issues led the school to developing its own benchmarks. "Doing all that made a huge difference. Analysing is fine, but what do we do with the results?"

The school therefore already had a commitment to literacy when, at this time, it joined the Ministry of Education Literacy Enhancement project. The education consultant who had worked with them for the Reading Recovery programme was also the project's literacy leadership facilitator. The school's first task on joining the project was "to fine tune the school's literacy vision" in a weekend workshop in mid 2000. This led to the school's vision statement, "Student achievement in literacy will be enhanced across the school."

Staff reviewed reading and writing across the whole school, and on this basis identified writing as the priority. Their specific aims were:

- to develop a collaborative belief about what is good writing, and about the strengths and weaknesses of current approaches and programmes;
- to develop a school-wide approach to planning, implementing, and assessing student writing;
- to upskill teaching staff, so that children's skills in writing would be enhanced.

The external literacy facilitator then recommended an initial set of goals and strategies. Staff development needs were identified through a teacher questionnaire (e.g., "identify 3 factors that you are particularly happy with, identify 3 factors that you would like to work on/develop"). The big issues at this time were teaching revision and editing, modelling good writing, and giving effective feedback. Teachers all understood their strengths and weaknesses and went away to teach to these: "I know what to teach now" (teacher).

In 2001, the school continued to have regular discussion of written language at syndicate and class meetings. Teachers focused on assessing student writing. The school's approach was to:

- Develop school-wide achievement objectives for written language levels and criteria. Criteria were specific, covering what most students would know or be able to do, what the best of writing, would include and teaching strategies for each level. "It took a term for teachers to get to grips with this as a whole school."
- Collect data for school-wide analysis. "We think we have a problem but how do we know?" This was done through a writing task with the same set of teacher directions for all students, following a common experience—a trip to the beach.
- Assess work against school expectations in Term 1, 2001. Work was first marked against criteria by teachers at syndicate level, then moderated by the school's literacy leader and the external literacy facilitator.
- Analyse each set of writing (271 students). This was done by the external facilitator.

The analysis showed that students in the junior school were achieving at a significantly higher level than students in the middle/senior school, especially at Years 5 and 6. A third (34 percent) of students were under-achieving at a very significant level. Gender played a role: a higher percentage of the highest achieving students were girls, and a higher percentage of the lowest achieving students were boys. Ethnicity also played a small role. Although achievement results were worse at Years 4 to 6, responsibility for these results was shared by all teachers. There was an effort to take a "no blame" approach: "Every teacher contributed to the differences."

Recently, another written questionnaire was completed by teachers. An evaluation meeting was about to be held as this case study data was being collected.

Measures to support teachers in their teaching of written language were:

- time for talking about written language at staff meetings, syndicate meetings, and in the staff room (this feature continued throughout the project and was noticeable when we visited the school);
- using a "buddy" system for new teachers so they were brought on board;
- whole school workshops on good classroom practice;
- observation by the external literacy facilitator of each teacher on the teacher's selected aspect of work;
- discussion by the teacher and external facilitator of strengths and areas for development;
- further observations by the external literacy facilitator in the next term;
- teachers' self-assessments;
- modelling by the external facilitator.

Through teachers giving good feedback, students were brought into the analytic process. Teachers acknowledged good written work, and explained to the student group why it was good. Teachers were explicit about what they expected to see at each level, and what students needed to work on. "We are very clear about what is effective feedback. Not 'Oh cool, that is great' sort of rubbish." (literacy leader)

At the same time, a consistent approach to planning was being developed across the school through two staff workshops (led by the external facilitator) and follow up workshops (led by the literacy leader). The staff developed a long-term implementation plan for English, short-term and long-term plans for written language, thematic unit plans based on English, procedures for maintaining assessment and evaluation records about students' writing, procedures for annotating written language samples in portfolios, and a set of achievement outcomes.

This year (2002), the external facilitator "will be weaned off". The school plans to revise its work on written language, and end the year with an evaluation. It has done some work with parents, including samples of students' writing in the weekly newsletter and "home hints" for parents on what to do with writing. The school plans to do more work with parents and hold community meetings, as well as develop writing portfolios for parents and ideas on activities parents can do with their children. "Parents want to help. They don't know what to do." (literacy leader)

Parents themselves echoed the literacy leader's views. "Teachers are very positive and try to give positive feedback, but we really want to know so we can help. We don't want teachers to be gilding the lily. As a parent I would be interested in how well my child is doing."

The principal also emphasised the importance of a useful and meaningful approach to parent reporting. "Reports reflect on the school and on the teacher, and must be done professionally. They need to be meaningful, show where the student is at, and where to go. There should be a person in there." The sample of reports that we saw were detailed, with clear information about what work the school is doing in curriculum areas, the student's attitudes to learning and capabilities, achievement levels, specific strengths and goals, as well as capturing the student's personality.

In a milestone report (October 2001), the literacy leader wrote, "While it is too soon to evaluate the impact of the literacy initiatives, teachers report a noticeable improvement in students' writing ability." She thought there was also an impact on teaching methods, being critical about what resources to purchase, assessment and "knowing where every child is at", evaluating work, and ensuring school funding is spent on the right things. She said that it is often now spent on teacher release for professional development.

Several teachers singled out the literacy and numeracy developments as significant change areas in the last 3–4 years. They described the impacts as:

- a willingness to acknowledge weaknesses and ask for ideas;
- a willingness to take risks;
- a tendency to be more focused at syndicate meetings;
- a more purposeful and streamlined approach—"not doing for the sake of doing";
- school-wide approach and understanding—"everyone is on board and working together and talking"; "'let's have a common understanding' should have been paramount—[before] I assumed we had a common understanding";
- good student profiles;
- a tendency to look at students more as individuals and see their abilities across all subject areas;
- use of others to get suggestions on how to work with particular students;
- clear assessment and use of this—"I know every child, where they are at, and where the whole school is at" (literacy leader).

Factors responsible for the success of this approach were seen as:

- The provision of external professional advice. The literacy leader warned that the "right person" should go to meetings about Ministry of Education projects, and that this is not necessarily the principal, who is usually the person invited to go.
- Ministry of Education funding. The school received a total of $37,758 over two years to be part of the project and share information from their school.
- The whole staff approach and makeup of staffing. "We all go together and no-one is seen as the expert." (literacy leader) "The balance of people teaching a long time to new people coming into the workforce." (senior teacher)

- The extended timeframe for the work. "Too many times we go to day courses and it changes nothing." (literacy leader) "Give it time. One thing we learned: it's better to do one or two things well than lots." (senior teacher)

Several teachers said that planning levels and collection of data had improved in other curriculum areas. Examples given were in maths, art, health and PE.

> Teachers are getting upskilled. Syndicate planning has improved. We are all getting the same messages. The junior and senior school are working on projects together. We discuss what we are doing. (science leader)

The assistant principal said that methods of observation of teaching, giving feedback, and role modelling are not confined to work on the literacy project: they are common approaches to professional development throughout the school.

Although we did not specifically investigate these other areas, we did ask about the school's approach to science.

The school's science vision had been largely written 6 years ago and updated 2 years ago. Like other schools in our study, science had a lower profile than other curriculum areas. The science leader said that parents regard literacy, numeracy, health, and PE as essential areas. The school's focus in the last few years had been on these, and on social studies and technology. "Fitting everything in is nightmarish."

The science leader had attended Ministry of Education contract courses on each strand, and thought her knowledge gained from these courses had helped to improve planning. She thought that teachers "possibly teach science more now" and are encouraged to use Ministry of Education resource books, which she thought were "very good". The school uses criteria-based assessments. A school-wide science assessment and report to the board was done in the third term 2001. However, the science leader thought there was "probably no data on changes to learning in science" because the school had not recorded assessments over time. She said that her energy went into health, for which she had responsibility, and she thought responsibility for science would go to someone else. She thought that science "needs someone to run with it".

Issues raised by teachers were:

- the relevance of pre-service teacher education, and a view that these programmes need to train teachers to develop curriculum level benchmarks, and how to scaffold children's learning to the next curriculum level;
- whether there is too much pressure from an "overcrowded curriculum"—some thought pressure seems to have been less since the publication of the new National Administration Guidelines (NAGs), which allow schools greater professional judgment.

Behaviour Initiative

There seems to be consistency between the school's belief in collective responsibility and in the value of critical thinking, and its approach to improving student behaviour. At the heart of the behaviour programme is the belief that students should take responsibility for student behaviour, and that they themselves can make sound decisions to resolve behaviour concerns. The behaviour initiative was set up 2 years ago. It superceded a detention system that had had widespread use.

The principal said that students' responses to a questionnaire on how they viewed the school showed that they had regarded rules about behaviour as unfair. This was a catalyst for revising how the school approached behaviour issues.

The current approach involves students mentoring other students, and those whose behaviour causes problems being asked to think about the consequences of their actions, the feelings of those involved, and a fair resolution. A group of senior students, nominated and voted for by students themselves are designated as "mentors", and take part in a training programme with the two Resource Teachers Learning and Behaviour (RTLBs) for the school. They are trained in active listening and negotiating. They are members of "buddy patrols", and are available to help resolve conflict or issues if asked to do so by students. The focus is on getting students to think about the consequences of their actions, and to consider what are the best decisions for them. Staff take this same consistent approach.

Students are given a verbal warning if their behaviour is a concern, and teachers follow established steps.

In the first instance, students are asked to reflect on what happened and why, how everyone involved felt, how they felt about that, and what they could have done (best decisions/solutions). What other decisions could they have made?

The next step is an interview with the teacher. Students are asked to think about 3 possible consequences for their actions. ("What do you think should happen because of your actions?") An agreed consequence is sought, and an undertaking about what the student will do next time. This is signed by teacher and student.

If there are 3 documented "interviews", a programme is set up with the involvement of the assistant principal. SES may be asked to be involved, or a meeting may be arranged with parents.

The assistant principal said that changes to behaviour had been documented. There are now fewer in-class problems, and students were no longer sitting outside in corridors. She put the success of the programme down to consistency, good role modelling, and collective responsibility.

The behaviour initiative was highly regarded by parents. Parents said that one of the things they most appreciate as a parent about the school was the "discipline plan and zero tolerance for violence". "There's a lot less yelling than there used to be. It's a different culture now." The board chair also thought there were improvements in behaviour. "You don't see knots of children. There's more intermingling."

Techniques that are used in other areas of professional support in this school have also assisted teachers in being able to address behavioural concerns. The assistant principal has helped one teacher by doing observations and making suggestions in her classroom. The RTLB has also done observations, and taught and modelled strategies.

Safe and Healthy Environment

The board chair, school secretary, clerical assistant, and principal all described the steps the school had taken to develop a safe, healthy, and attractive environment.

> We've done heaps on the school environment. There is a person on the board who is into shady schools. We have done a lot of planting and built two permanent fixtures [shade houses]. We've done a lot with the school admin block. Before that support staff had a shocking environment. We've carpeted classrooms. (board chair)

Specifically, the school built two shade houses with seating and provided seating around trees. It provides sunscreen lotion, and Home and School arranged for sun hats to be sold at a cheap rate. Sun hats are required to be worn at all times outside in terms 1 and 4. PE takes place before 11 am in terms 1 and 4.

This year the school received an award as a "sun safe school". The board chair said that if he could have his time again, he would have arranged to put up the shade houses sooner.

Gone are the pies and sausage rolls. School lunches are now healthy lunches, and the menu is designed by students. The school received a bronze heart award for this in 2001.

Students participate in "Kidsafe Week" and in 2001 students were involved in producing a road safety video for the Land Transport Safety Authority.

A new administration block was built in 2001. This made a significant difference to the working conditions of support staff, the "welcoming feel" to the school, and the ability of students to access administrative services. It created a private interview room. The clerical assistant said that before the new block was built, she "was stuck in a cupboard. There were no storage cupboards and everything was up high. The safe was under the floor." The old administration area "was a tiny little room and children had to line up to see you". Support staff had a say in the design and colours of the new block. It has a broad counter at students' height. There are higher benches, so there is no bending, and plenty of storage space. The interview room provides a private space.

The school was networked in 2000, and this had a big impact on the work that administration staff can do. "We are able to do lots for the teacher."

However, the board chair said that financial constraints still left major property matters requiring work. There was insufficient funding to upgrade the toilets ("we needed $700,000 but only got $340,000") and the school would like a swimming pool.

The principal pointed out that the school would have been able to do more under the previous capital works system. The fire in 1999 "ate into" the bulk funded allocation. Now the school is left with only $340,00 over 10 years, which is insufficient for all that is needed. The principal thought schools should not manage property.

> I think the model is flawed. The government wants us to pick up standards but put energy into what a property manager does. There is also a dilemma in having relocatables. If they were to go [because of roll numbers] we would have nowhere to put our resources. We are disadvantaged by not having permanent buildings.

A Strong Staff Team

Several participants said that the school had been a "good" school for many years, and had good leadership. Some teachers and the board chair said that the previous principal had also been effective. "She was a role model. She had a wonderful strength." The current principal agreed: "When I arrived the school was already good. The base was very strong." The principal had been at the school for 6 years and had built on that base.

The principal had a clear view of the nature of leadership, and had thought and read deeply about effective leadership. His background is theoretical as well as practical. He is studying for a post-graduate Diploma in Educational Administration. Others in the school are also doing further tertiary education. He is part of a principals' mentoring group with two principals outside the school's geographical area, so he himself is professionally supported and has access to outside ideas.

He believes that as principal, he needs to build good relationships and effective communication, and "empower" staff to use and develop their strengths. This requires him to let go of some things, and to look for opportunities for others to take leadership. He described himself as a "conductor", using the skills of each member of the staff team, and working from a basis of trust and collaboration. In making staff appointments, he said he takes care to choose good people who are assertive and want to be involved. He is prepared to take an unconventional approach to senior management appointments, for example by looking mainly at ability and skills, rather than years of experience. He said the school is strongly supported by capable administrative staff, and this is a factor that he thinks "frees up" the teaching staff. Each player "knows their place in the system", and takes initiatives in their area of responsibility. "Good change hasn't come from the top or bottom. It's a meeting of the two."

The staff team seemed cohesive and spirited, and leadership was encouraged. One of the things parents said they appreciated most about the school was the staff. "I love the energy and enthusiasm of the teachers and the way they respect children." Teachers themselves singled out collaborative working relationships as one of the school's achievements over the last 3–4 years, and regarded staffing as a current strength of the school. The way teachers work on curriculum and behaviour management issues is further evidence of deep collaboration on teaching and learning issues. The school secretary also thought that staff characteristics were important factors in the school's success. "We've got some strong and dominant people who strive and push for children to do well. If they don't they try to fix it. Get outside help for them."

Parents commented that staff are all approachable and parents are welcomed in the school.

> The ladies in the office are very approachable. Really helpful. [The principal] too is approachable. He smiles a lot and that's good too. From a parent perspective you can walk into the classroom any time. You are asked to sit down and acknowledged.

The board chair thought the key to the strong staff team was the way in which the principal "empowered" staff. As a result, he thought staff were "more confident and happy as a staff group". He attributed the good learning environment to the "great" staff.

The Role of the Board of Trustees

The board chair thought the most significant changes to the board of trustees' way of operating in the last 3–4 years was its organisation into subcommittees to work in depth on policies and issues. There are 4 subcommittees: a staffing committee, finance committee, property committee, and community consultation committee. Each subcommittee brings its report to the wider board meeting, where there is whole board discussion on any contentious issues or issues requiring careful thought. Plenty of time is available for such discussions, and the board chair gives warning if they are likely to arise. Straightforward issues are dealt with efficiently. The board chair thinks this way of operating enables the work to be well thought out and meaningful.

In addition, the board chair said he had worked with the principal to set up systems so that the board could have feedback on teaching and learning. Currently, each syndicate in the school gives a presentation at board meetings on issues and achievements, so that the board is alert to school-wide levels of achievement. "We can see where things are tracking." The board is shown information on where students should be on their chronological age, which students are at risk, and where they should be. Some anonymous examples of children's work are shown. "Teachers explain what is good and why, what is below par and what they would like to see." Hence a key element of staff work with the board is to build understanding, further evidence of this school's reflective culture.

The board has made some major achievements over the last 3–4 years. It has developed strong up-to-date school policies in all areas of governance and management. In doing this, it looked at other schools' policies, and examined their value. The principal said the school now reviews policies once a year, asking of each policy item "Is it useful?" The board used the expertise of a member to initiate the building of "shade houses" and use of sunscreen.

The board chair is in the school 2–3 times a week, and usually talks to the principal at these times. "He tells me where things are. I do the same. We don't run by surprises."

The board has a tradition of gaining feedback from parents, students, and staff on the delivery of education and the school's operation through annual surveys. For example, the 2000 parent community questionnaire asked three questions:

- What is the school doing well?
- What are the things the school could improve on?
- How to improve the consultation and communication between the BOT and parents/caregivers?

Board members also talked with parents in the school over a few days when they encouraged them to fill in the questionnaires. From a parent perspective, there was satisfaction with the board's communication. The parents whom we interviewed were positive about the "regular newsletters that come home every Thursday" and the "occasional survey". They felt there was "plenty of opportunity to have their say".

The work of the board is not rubber-stamping others' ideas. According to the chair, "everyone is open for suggestions". An example was his own suggestion that "walkie talkies" would be a useful tool for communication within the school. The chair had found out that other schools used these. He brought his own one down to show, then arranged for some to be trialled on a school trip. These were subsequently adopted, and are used within the school and on trips.

What enables this board to operate effectively? The chair attributed its successful operation to two factors. First, an NZSTA representative did useful training with board members. In particular, this helped them to see the boundaries of their role, which the chair describes as "giving a good foundation from where to teach. We would be remiss if we didn't ask about learning. Then they say 'Get [the professional consultant] in' and we do it."

The second factor was described by the chair as "empowerment. There isn't one head honcho." Meetings of the board are purposeful.

> As chair I tell them my expectations. You are wearing parents' hats. You can't just push your own kid's barrow. You need to look at the whole school. We are here for everyone.

Each meeting runs for two hours, and the chair keeps to a tight timeframe.

The principal thought that the changes enabled the board to focus on teaching and learning and "matters of substance as opposed to trivia". In developing school policies, the board had openly looked at other schools' policies, and this had helped members to get a rounded picture and develop their own ideas. The principal had a clear view of the role of the board (to oversee the school functioning) and of the principal (professional leadership and day-to-day running of the school). He thought NZSTA training had helped the board to understand its role. He works with the board so that they know what is happening, and the assistant principal, deputy principal, and staff representative also attend board meetings and have speaking rights.

He and other senior staff thought the board is essential to school improvement.

> They are the eyes and ears to the school. They give feedback in a professional way about what is happening. They offer a parent's view and get behind us. It is important that the beliefs and values that come from the community are embedded in the school.

The factors that seem to assist the board to operate effectively seemed to be:

- a good relationship between the board chair and principal, with each understanding and respecting each other's role;
- collaboration with staff;
- the board being well-informed about student achievement and other school issues;
- staff and board working in a way that promotes understanding;
- the board regularly consulting with parents, staff, and students, and using their feedback to make changes;
- the board being genuinely involved in planning, policy development, and review;
- the board learning from other schools;

- the board's style of operation being purposeful and open;
- the board being supported through NZSTA training.

Linkages with Health, Welfare, and Community Organisations, Other Schools, and Early Childhood Services

> I don't believe we're an island. (principal)

This school actively initiates strong linkages with health, welfare, and community organisations. The school has not only maintained communication over specific students and issues, it has also forged agreements for service provision, particularly in response to students' health needs.

One need was to find cheap and effective treatment for students with sight and hearing problems. This arose after junior class teachers noticed that some students did not seem to be responding to teaching programmes as expected. They believed that all children want to learn, and that for some, learning could be impeded by physical problems. They decided therefore that investigation of the hearing and sight of all children who were referred to a reading programme was warranted. The literacy leader has taken responsibility for working with local doctors, and developing a referral system through them to a local optometrist, OPSM (a provider of inexpensive eye testing and glasses), the local hospital service, and the ear van at the local health centre. She said that before this system was set up, students' hearing and sight problems were not all being picked up by local doctors. Formal referral by the local doctor meant charges to families would be minimal. Other schools within the wider area have heard about these ideas from the school, and are also implementing them.

Some of the range of organisations or specialist staff that the school regularly uses are: RTLBs, Specialist Education Services (now Group Special Education), College of Education advisors, Police "Keeping Safe", Life Education Trust, and CYFS. The school has found CYFS "hard to contact", and has on occasion threatened to contact their local Member of Parliament if action did not happen. It has also reported slowness in follow-up by Specialist Education Services for students who were not ORS funded.

This school has extensive contact with other schools to:

- share experiences of how it approaches curriculum areas—particularly following publicity in the *Education Gazette* of its work under the Ministry of Education Literacy Enhancement project;
- see how other schools do things, e.g., we reported earlier how the board learned from the policies of other schools, and how the literacy leader learned about interpreting an assessment tool from another school.

The literacy leader noticed the positive impact of good early childhood education, and appreciates the close relationship with the playcentre located on the school grounds. The school's goal for 2002 was to work closely with early childhood centres in the area.

External Context

Some teachers thought the 1999 change in government had an effect on students, parents, the school, the education system, and the labour market. The assistant principal thought there was more money to spend.

> This year we are probably the most affluent we have been. I've felt there has been money to spend. There's carpet in the classroom. The environment—trees, shade area. . . . The physical environment feels better. Brollies on tables. It looks better. People want to come—it looks and feels good. For children, there's stability.

She also thought that more parents were in paid employment, because of an increase in the number of jobs. Students seemed more focused and settled as a result.

She thought that the education system generally was more "settled". "Things are not thrown at us. Things are getting cleaned up, like special education. Agencies are more accessible."

Another teacher thought that concerns about bulk funding of teachers' salaries had hampered collegiality, and this had been improved with the abolition of bulk funding. She also thought that "the government appears to look more favourably on teachers' roles. There's a little less teacher bashing."

The approach being taken by ERO was valued by the school. The school was reviewed a few weeks before our case study. Three teachers thought this ERO visit was useful, as they said the reviewers took a constructive approach, offering useful feedback and good ideas for improvement. The board chair also thought the review process was constructive, and he was proud of the ERO report. "I know what we are doing is on the right track." ERO's current approach reflects the new requirement that the focus of reviews should be on educational improvement, and ERO should provide advice to schools where necessary.

The board chair thought that government changes were "a bit better for our school". He had a sense that this government wanted to change schools only for the right reasons. As long as they are viable, they could stay open. He contrasted this attitude with that of the previous government, where he felt some local decisions, such as recapitation of one of the contributing schools had been made too quickly.

The group of parents thought that the change of government policy on bulk funding of teachers' salaries had made the education system less competitive. Like the board chair, they also thought that the government had a different approach to school restructuring from the previous government. "I can feel it. This minister said we won't recapitate unless there's a darn good reason."

Rico School's own organisation, schooling within the area, and parental choice of secondary school all seem to have had some influence on who attends the school. Until 1999, the school had its own whanau unit. At this time the school had 14 classes. In 1999, the two bilingual classes were too small to be viable, and needed to be reduced to one. This was a contentious decision, made after consultation with whanau parents. Following this decision, some whanau parents decided to go to another local school that offered bilingual education, and the unit was disbanded. The current organisation is in two syndicates.

There were different perspectives on these internal changes. The board chair said the decisions upset some of the teachers, but were necessary. The parents whom we interviewed thought there were pros and cons to this change. On the one hand, one parent saw the two bilingual classes as operating in quite a divisive, separate, and segregated way. This, she thought, was not positive, and contrasted with the current situation where everyone worked for the whole school. On the other hand, she thought that "from a parent perspective, quite a lot of resource knowledge went". In retrospect, the principal thought that he would have liked there to have been more consideration about the long-term impact of bilingual education in the school at the time the unit was set up.

Those teachers who commented on the school's reorganisation into two syndicates were positive about this impact. "It's more cohesive and less fragmented. I may not have had as much up-to-date information before." Parents had one negative comment on this: that it is harder to organise and supervise school trips, because the groups are so large.

Early in 2000, one of the contributing schools in the area recapitated. One parent thought this drew some students from Rico School, because their parents preferred their children to attend a full primary school, and so avoid going to the local intermediate. Rico School has also had requests from parents that it should recapitate. The school's response was to seek an area review of Years 7 and 8 schooling. The approach taken by the Ministry of Education to the area review, however, has raised issues about what the ideal school size is, rather than predominantly focusing on Years 7 and 8 schooling. "The Ministry of Education says that good schools are big schools." (principal) According to the board chair, NZEI (the teachers' and support staff union) has been invaluable in giving evidence about the value and viability of small schools within New Zealand. The shape of schooling in the local area future is one of the identified challenges facing this school.

The principal thought another external impact on who attends Rico School is the reputation of local secondary schools. Some parents move to be close to the secondary school that they want their child to attend.

School Funding

As a decile 2 school, Rico School receives decile weighted Targeted Funding, the Special Education Grant, and vandalism component of the operations grant. The school asks for $40 per child in activities fees, and $40 as a donation to the school. In 2000, the school raised a nett $11,311 in local funds (local funds income minus local funds expenditure). This came from $548 for stationery, $3,659 for lunches, $4,656 for fund-raising and $2,448 for activities fees.

The school welcomed the redistribution of funding when bulk funding of teachers' salaries was disbanded. The funding enabled the school to employ extra teachers and reduce class size for new entrants.

One of the features parents most appreciated about the school was that school fees are low at $40 per student per year, which they thought was lower than most other schools. They also appreciated that there were flexible ways of paying the activity fee.

Students' Views

Almost all of the most positive responses of the 20 Year 6 students relate to student learning and teacher actions to support learning. These highly scored items affirm the school's provision of positive and effective feedback and guidance, students' liking for the teacher, and fair treatment by teachers. Other highly scored items were personal: most students usually have good friends, usually enjoy themselves, and never/hardly ever feel lonely.

The items that showed more variable or moderate responses were about students' interests being matched by teachers, and engagement in school work, including whether students "do interesting things", "get bored", "can learn what they need for their future", "get tired of trying", and "could do better work if they tried".

Like other schools, for the item "Students behave well in class", most of the students in Rico School mainly marked "sometimes". However, in respect to their own behaviour and feelings of safety, a small majority thought that usually they personally keep out of trouble, feel safe in the playground, and hardly ever or never get a hard time or get bullied.

The things Year 6 students liked best about the school were people. Most students specified teachers, the principal, or staff, followed by friends. Students appreciated the ways in which people related to each other, specifying respect, fairness, and helpfulness as attributes of interactions. Two students liked the Behaviour Initiative. Two examples:

> How if something's gone wrong we get it sorted out and how we children help teachers and teachers help children . . . and tumeke instead of [detention].

> How many kind, playful and helpful kids are in the school and how people are interested in what you're doing.

Half the students singled out schoolwork in general or particular subjects as things they liked best. Some liked the lunchtime and playtime breaks.

The high ratings for teachers, school work or subject areas, and communication support the view that teachers in this school are liked and valued, that learning is enjoyable, and that the school culture is based on respectful and responsible relationships.

Seven Year 6 students would like to learn more, spend more time on some subjects, or have harder homework, suggesting they had a keen interest in learning, e.g.:

> I like maths, writing, reading and lunch/play time better than English and other subjects so I would like [to focus] on them more.

A few students wanted changes to the toilets, with one student stating they were filthy. Other suggested changes were to provide more sports activities or equipment. Students said they would like to be allowed to bring scooters to school, have "the hoops out more", change the senior fort, and buy more sports gear and books. Other suggestions were for the school to upgrade to an intermediate, and for the school to be painted.

The things Year 4 liked best about the school were school work and friends. Specific subject areas, schoolwork, and hard work were all identified.

Following these, students next liked their teachers and sports activities, e.g.:

> My teachers because they are cool they help me and [encourage] me to do stuff and [aren't] mean.

Five students liked everything in the school. "I like everything in this [whole] school", "I like this school because it gives you good [education] and I get to know stuff I didn't know".

Three students liked lunchtime.

The things Year 4 students would like to change about the school were the playground, and playground equipment or activities. Some specified that they would like to be allowed to bring skates, scooters, or marbles to school, and one wanted a pet day. Three wanted people to be well behaved, e.g., "No bad people so I will be happy again", "No-one bossy".

Teachers' Views

Profile of Teachers Who Completed Surveys

Sex	Female	11
Position	Classroom teacher	7
	Senior teacher	1
	Part-time teacher	1
	AD/DP	2
Years of teaching experience	Less than 2	2
	2–4 years	2
	5–10 years	2
	11–20 years	3
	21 plus years	2
Years at Rico School	Less than 2	4
	2–4 years	4
	5–10 years	2
	11–20 years	
	21 plus years	1
Qualifications	Diploma of Teaching (8), BEd (4), Advanced Diploma of Teaching and Higher Diploma of Teaching (2), Teachers' Certificate (2), Advanced Diploma of Teaching and Diploma in Education of the Deaf, Reading Recovery Certificate, Bachelor of Arts	
Membership of professional organisations	NZEI (5), WESA, NZEI Komiti Pasifika	

The items most highly rated by teachers are related to teacher action with respect to teaching and learning, and support the theme that this school has a highly analytical and reflective culture that is focused on student achievement. The only 2 items where teachers were equivocal or varied in their viewpoints were that "students have some say in the school strategic plan", and "non-teaching staff have input into the school strategic plan".

Teachers who had been at the school for more than 3–4 years agreed or strongly agreed that the school expects more of students now, and that they have made positive changes to the way they teach, monitor their progress more, and have made positive changes to the way the school runs. Most strongly agreed or agreed that "We have made positive changes to how we plan ahead." The only disagreement from one person is whether the school "acknowledges children's cultures more" and "makes more use of te reo Māori". Since this period of time coincided with the closing of the immersion classes, this response is not unexpected.

Teachers described the achievements of the school over the last 3–4 years in relation to the school's improved focus on teaching and learning. These included:

- collecting data (2), e.g., "collecting data before we presume anything so we are quite sure what we will target";
- identifying benchmarks/achievement levels and using these to target teaching (2), e.g., "targeting help to children with special needs";
- collaborative planning (3), e.g., "making sure the planning and expectations are more consistent across the school";
- critical analysis of own teaching and strategies (1), e.g., "looking at our own teaching methods and strategies so we can improve learning";
- collaborative working relationships and whole school professional development (3), e.g., "staff working within the structures and crossing over and out as appropriate";
- how student progress is monitored (2), e.g., "positive changes in how we teach and monitor children's progress";
- higher achievement levels (1).

Two teachers named the literacy work, and one the work with special needs and behaviour as achievements.

Teachers thought the current strengths were:

- Professional development for the whole school (5). An associated response was that this school offers a "positive learning environment" (2).
- Specific programmes (4). Two teachers noted literacy programmes, one noted behaviour management, and one child development referrals.
- Using staff strengths and encouraging leadership (2), support for new staff (1), strong senior management (1), and the staff (1).
- Effective communication, collaboration, and support among staff (4), supportive environment (1), good relationships with students (1).
- Knowledge of learning in senior and junior levels (1).
- Assessing and trialling new ideas in all areas of teaching and learning (1).

The picture is of a close knit team of teachers who are committed to student learning and well-being, open to critique, encouraged to use their expertise, and are themselves good communicators.

There were few changes that teachers would like to make. Four teachers made no response to an item asking "What changes would you like to see in this school over the next couple of years if any?" or said "No changes", "Nothing". Of the other teachers who responded, 2 wanted "to continue to question/challenge ourselves", 2 wanted to nurture the changes made, and 3 wanted to extend professional development or set achievement standards in all curriculum areas.

Support Staff Views

We have not presented responses for the three support staff who filled in the survey, as they all left many questions blank. However, they all strongly disagreed or disagreed with the item "Support staff have input into the school strategic plan". Some were not employed at the time the strategic plan was developed, and it was noted that many of the support staff members work part-time, making it difficult for them to participate in planning which takes place after school finishes. Support staff all strongly agreed or agreed with other items related to support staff involvement: "There is effective communication between teachers and support staff", "Support staff like working in this school", "Support staff feel involved in the life of the school", and "Senior staff openly recognise support staff when they do things well".

Challenges for the Future

Those participants who were interviewed were asked what major challenges lie ahead for the school.

Most talked about the challenges of organisational change. There was apprehension about the outcome of the area review or recapitation (5 people), and about change in general (1).

> How schooling in the area fits. (principal)
>
> The possibility of recapitating is scary. Uncertainty. (assistant principal)
>
> There is uncertainty about where we will go. There is not too much energy if it all changes. (teacher)

Five participants recognised the strength of the school and thought a challenge was sustaining this and moving forward.

> Keeping up the momentum. (science leader)
>
> Carrying on the path we are going and not going backwards because we are on a roll. On a personal note [what I enjoy most about the school] is my son coming home eager to do his homework. Eager to learn. (board chair)

> Keeping it on the level it's going at the moment. (beginning teacher)
>
> How to keep going and keep fresh. There is a danger when you are going well that you will slack off. (senior teacher)
>
> Sustaining it and taking it to a higher level. What are essential skills and order in which to teach them? Bringing our parents in, having kids no matter what age share writing. (deputy principal)

Staffing and retaining good staff were identified as challenges by 3 participants. Parents wanted to "retain young energetic teachers", and were also keen to have male teachers recruited to teach in the school.

Other challenges identified by one person in each case were:

- improving facilities in the school hall;
- curriculum challenges, e.g., "We have really pushed development in maths, we are undergoing development in literacy and arts, we are not even thinking about science and technology. It is demanding and time consuming";
- developing a coherent planning system, e.g., "Personally I would like to see the same sheets and templates used throughout the school so any teacher can understand them";
- transience—how to create coherence and continuity, e.g., "33 percent on reading recovery have moved from or to another school. This figure highlights the problem of transience"; "We don't get some information back from other schools [when students move]";
- getting "a decent amount of parent involvement";
- the "effort teachers put in at weekends";
- computers—staff training in use of computers, pressures to develop ICT;
- property, e.g., "Things like Ministry of Education taking classrooms away".

Summary

The ERO official's description of this school as "a good school getting better" seems apt. There has been substantive concerted effort by all teaching staff to improve teaching and learning and this effort is having an impact. We found evidence of improvement in measures of achievement in written language, in perceptions of change in student behaviour, and in teachers' own understanding of effective practice and their capabilities as teachers.

A striking feature is the way in which the school has developed an analytic and openly thoughtful culture with students' interests at the heart. There seem to be a number of crucial elements in the success of the school's approach to improving learning. Benchmarks are established by the whole school, so that all teachers know the standards. Evidence of student learning is collected and analysed in order to plan for teaching and learning. Consistency of analysis is assured through teachers working together. Analysis is used to target students and teaching strategies, and to inform planning. There is a school-wide approach to crucial learning areas.

The school benefited from provision of professional development, especially Ministry of Education professional development contracts involving the whole teaching staff, which extended teachers' curriculum knowledge, and assisted them to clarify goals and values, analyse teaching and learning, and change teaching practice.

The focus on students' interests runs through the initiatives the school has taken to advance students' health and safety at school (e.g., healthy lunches, shade houses), and to link the school with effective health providers.

The school provides an adult work environment that enables ongoing opportunity and support for analysis, discussion, and learning. Time is made available at staff and syndicate meetings. Workshops, professional advice and guidance, teacher observation, self-assessment, and modelling are some of the tools for professional development. The teachers' work environment appears to be one of the critical elements that influences teachers' capacity to work in a reflective way. Teachers are further supported by school and leadership values that emphasise collaboration, good communication, and responsibility. These values flow through into expectations for students.

There seems to be a sound basis for school operation in the support provided by administrative staff, and the work of the board on policy and strategic planning, staffing, school property, and community consultation.

We saw how this school is influenced by what happens in surrounding schools. Our evidence indicated that the external economic and social policy environment may now be more supportive of families with respect to employment opportunities. As well, education policy changes, especially removal of bulk funding of teachers' salaries, have brought some more money into the system and led to a greater sense of stability; but area reorganisation is unsettling.

Some professional issues were raised by the school's story of its development. Different teachers may have different interpretations of the same assessment data. In this school, consistency was achieved through a process of talking, benchmarking, and moderation. We also heard that administrative instructions for some assessment material are not always clear to teachers.

Another issue is the extent to which initial teacher education programmes prepare students for the practicalities of classroom teaching.

The case study provides an example of how different factors are meshed:

- students' health, stability, and well-being;
- the classroom context and the skills of the teacher;
- the teacher's work environment, as it impacts on the teacher's capacity to plan, evaluate, and analyse teaching and learning;
- the school's values, and the extent to which they support a learning environment;
- the external context in which the school is placed, and how policies, government agencies, and organisations impact on schools and families.

A question for our return in 3 years is whether change in one of these factors affects others.

Table 9

Year 6 Students' Views of Their Experience at School (n=20)

School is a place where	Mostly	Sometimes	Never/hardly ever	No response
My teacher tells me when I do good work	19	1		
Teachers treat me fairly	18	2		
I like my teachers	17	2	1	
I have good friends	17	3		
The rules are fair	16	1	3	
Teachers explain things clearly to me	16	4		
Teachers help me to improve my work	15	5		
I enjoy myself	15	4	1	
I feel safe in the playground	13	5	2	
I get all the help I need	13	6	1	
I learn most things pretty quickly	13	7		
I keep out of trouble	12	7	1	
I can learn what I need for the future	11	7	2	
Teachers listen to what I say	11	8	1	
I do interesting things	9	11		
I could do better work if I tried	7	11	2	
I get tired of trying	5	8	7	
Students behave well in class	4	16		
I get bored	3	12	5	
I get bullied	2	4	13	1
I get a hard time	1	6	13	
I feel restless	1	10	9	
I feel lonely		5	15	
I get upset		8	12	

Table 10

Year 4 Students' Views of Their Experience at School (n=20)

School is a place where	Mostly	Sometimes	Never/hardly ever	No response
I belong in this school	19	1		
I try hard at school	18	2		
My teacher helps me to do better work	14	4	1	1
My teacher is kind to me	13	6		1
I feel safe in the playground	13	6	1	
My teacher is fair to me	13	7		
I like my school	12	7		1
I like my work	12	6	1	1
My teacher tells me when I do good work	12	8		
Children in my class behave well	3	16	1	

Table 11

Teachers' Views of Their School (n=11)

The school now	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain/ Disagree	No response
Teachers regularly discuss ways of improving students' learning	10	1		
Staff encourage students to try their best	9	2		
Teachers regularly monitor the learning and progress of individual children	9	2		
Students' work is prominently displayed	9	2		
Senior staff are available to discuss curriculum/teaching matters	8	3		
Teachers respect students	8	3		
Teachers believe that all children can be successful	8	3		
Teachers regularly collaborate to plan their teaching	8	3		
The primary concern of everyone in the school is student learning	8	3		
At staff meetings time is spent on important things rather than on minor issues	8	3		
Adults (teachers) as well as students learn in this school	8	3		
Teachers in this school believe that all students can learn	8	3		
Student success is regularly celebrated in this school	8	3		
Staff ensure that students receive constructive feedback about their work	7	3	1	
New staff are well supported in this school	7	4		
Whole school meetings are worthwhile	4	7		
There is mutual respect between staff and senior staff in this school	7	4		
The senior staff communicate a clear vision of where the school is going	7	4		
If staff have a problem with their teaching they usually turn to colleagues for help	7	4		
Teachers like working in the school	7	3	1	
Staff have a commitment to the whole school and not just their class or syndicate	7	4		
Teachers in this school believe that all students can be successful	7	4		
Teachers encourage students to be independent learners	6	5		
The school allows staff joint planning time	6	5		
Staff in this school work hard to promote and maintain good relations with the community	6	4	1	
Staff feel encouraged to bring forward new ideas	6	4	1	
There is effective communication between senior staff and teachers	6	5		
Staff development time is used effectively in the school	6	5		
Non-teaching staff feel involved in the life of the school	6	4	1	
There is regular staff discussion about how to achieve school goals and targets	6	5		
Standards set for students are consistently upheld across the school	6	4	1	
Disruption in classes is dealt with promptly so that learning for all students can proceed	6	5		
Students are clear about standards of behaviour expected in the school	6	5		
There is effective communication among teachers	5	6		
Staff participate in important decision making	5	5	1	
Parents are clear about behaviour standards expected in school	5	6		
Senior staff openly recognise teachers when they do things well	5	6		
The board of trustees plays a significant role in supporting developments within the school	5	6		
Teachers have a say in topics selected for the school's staff development programme	4	6		1
Teachers share similar beliefs and attitudes about effective teaching/learning	4	6	1	
The staff encourage parents to be involved in the school	4	7		
Extra curricular activities provide valuable opportunities for all students	4	6	1	
Decision-making processes are fair	3	7	1	
Expectations about school work are communicated clearly to all students	3	7	1	
Every attempt is made to set challenging standards of achievement for each student	3	8		
Students in this school are enthusiastic about learning	3	8		
The school communicates clearly to parents the standard of work it expects from students	3	7	1	
Teachers have a say in the school strategic plan	3	5	3	
The school development plan includes practical ways of evaluating success in achieving goals and targets	3	5	2	1
Teachers pay attention to keeping the school environment attractive	2	8	1	
Students respect teachers	1	10		
Teachers regularly observe each other in the classroom and give each other feedback	1	7	2	1
Students have some say in the school strategic plan	1	4	4	2
Non-teaching staff have input into the school strategic plan	1	4	5	1

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Table 12

Teachers' Views of Change Over the Last 3–4 Years (n=11)

Change over the last 3–4 years	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Don't know
We expect more of our students	6	1			4
We have made positive changes to the way we teach	4	3			4
We enjoy our work more	3	3	1		4
Student behaviour has improved	2	3	1		5
We have made positive changes to the way the school runs	2	4			5
We have more professional development	2	2	2		5
We have more contact with other schools		2	4		5
We have made positive changes to how we plan ahead	2	3	1		5
We monitor our progress more	3	4			4
Parents show more interest in their children's learning	1	1	5		4
We acknowledge children's cultures more		2	3	1	5
We make more use of te reo Māori		3	2	1	5

PURIRI SCHOOL

Introduction

Puriri School Profile

School type	Contributing primary	
Roll size	186	
Decile rating	1a	
Locality	Suburban	
Student ethnicity	Māori	– 44%
	Pasifika	– 39%
	Pākehā	– 10%
	Asian	– 3%
	Indian	– 3%
	Papua New Guinea	– 1%
Staffing entitlement	8	
Actual staffing	7 teachers, reading recovery teacher (0.4), ESOL teacher (0.4)	
Release time	0.2 principal release	
Recommended	By a Ministry of Education official as an "improving school", a curriculum facilitator as "Making big inroads over time. Moving ahead in literacy", and an educational consultant who had worked with the school on the Ministry of Education Literacy Enhancement Project.	

Puriri School is a contributing primary school. Its decile rating of 1a is the lowest socio-economic rating for schools in New Zealand. Almost half (48 percent) of students are in families where parents/caregivers are unemployed. Most of the other parents/caregivers are in poorly paid jobs, and many of these work part-time. State rental accommodation is a predominant form of housing in this suburb. Parent incomes are generally very low.

A feature of the student group is the high proportion of Māori and of Pasifika students, and the low proportion of Pākehā students. Asian, Indian, and Papua New Guinean students make up the rest of the student group. Pasifika students are of Samoan, Tongan, Fijian, Tokelauan, and Cook Islands nationalities. Many of these come to school with English as a second language. The school reports a high number of transient students, defined by the school as students who come to school from other schools. In 2001, 50 of the 186 students (27 percent) have come to the school from other schools. Several teachers and the principal said that many of these students leave again within a short time. The school does not collect data on this.

The roll generated staffing entitlement in 2001 was 8 (including 0.1 ORRS, 0.7 management and 0.3 Guaranteed Staffing Component). Additional staffing included two RTLBs as attached teachers, and an RTLB Support Time Allowance of 0.1.

In practice, the school employed 7 teachers, a reading recovery teacher (0.4), and an ESOL teacher (0.4), and provided some principal release. Support staff are an executive officer, a clerical assistant, 5 teacher aides, a caretaker, and a cleaner. Three RTLBs are based in the school, and serve 11 other primary schools and one intermediate school. There is a dental clinic on site.

This school had a fire in 1979 which destroyed all the school buildings. The new school is largely built around a central square, with covered walkways connecting the buildings. The school is open plan, except for the new entrants' classroom, and divided into junior, middle, and senior areas. There is no school hall, and limited space for specialist staff to work.

There is a large playing field, open to the public outside school hours. A number of years ago, Black Power members from the community built an adventure playground for the school.

The school was recommended as an "improving" school by a Ministry of Education official, a curriculum facilitator, and an educational consultant. The Ministry of Education official described it as "Pretty stable. Not an easy school. Moves steadily." The curriculum facilitator described it as "Making big inroads over time. Moving ahead in literacy." The educational consultant worked with the school as the external facilitator on the Ministry of Education Literacy Enhancement Project.

In this school we interviewed the principal, the literacy leader (the assistant principal), the science curriculum leader (a beginning teacher), four other teachers, the executive officer, the clerical assistant, a teacher aide, a group of three parents, and the board chair.

The school ethos seemed to be tailored to the needs of its student group. Among major developments in the last 3–4 years, 3 stand out as crucial. These were the school's efforts to improve student behaviour, especially to eliminate violence and bullying; its concentrated attention on curriculum goals, especially literacy; and its beginning efforts to involve parents of different cultural groups in the operation of the school and in students' learning. The material highlighted the vulnerability of families served by this school to changes in the wider social and economic context, and the impact of these factors on the school itself.

School Philosophy and Nature of the Student Group

The school's mission statement is:

> To provide a caring, stable environment, where children are culturally sensitive and encouraged to become confident independent lifelong learners.

A predominant concern with "care", "stability", and "learning" were also reflected in many of the statements made by staff, board chair, and parents about why they liked working/being involved at this school, their own beliefs about education, what was important for students to learn, and what the school valued. Everyone emphasised the fundamental importance of literacy—being able to read and write—and the teachers also emphasised numeracy, as prime goals of primary education. In addition, attitudes to life and learning were described as critical by teachers, for example: "the need for students to think rather than react, to be equipped for the outside world, to get on with people", "to learn to think for themselves", "to become independent and have respect for themselves and others".

The staff demonstrated in their statements a real liking for the students and an appreciation of their home backgrounds.

> I like teaching. I like the fact you can make a difference. This may be the only stable environment for some of the kids. They are not saturated or bored. They soak it up. They are street-wise, have get-up-and-go. (teacher)
>
> I like the community and teaching these sparky kids. (literacy leader)
>
> I like the children themselves. They are warm-hearted kids. (teacher)

Staff emphasised the importance of students learning to keep themselves safe. One teacher thought more could be done by the school in health and physical education. Low income, poor parental education and harmful home circumstances for some students were all factors that required special work. The school's efforts to assist families, to involve parents, and to work with outside agencies are described in separate sections of this case study.

A high level of transience was identified as a problem for the school by teachers, parents, and the principal, because of the disruption to students' learning in changing schools, and the need for the school to have to carry out individual assessments when records were not forwarded by the previous school. The school prides itself on having a good system to send on files of students who leave the school.

Student Behaviour and Appearance of the School

Participants were asked to describe the most significant changes that have happened in the school over the last 3–4 years. One change for this school was the implementation of a behaviour policy that set high standards of behaviour for all students. The principal said that when he first started at the school in 1989, it was quite a violent school. Students were often "lined up" at the principal's door, and teachers engaged in a lot of "yelling". His belief was that behaviour needed to be sorted out before students could learn.

In 1994 the school was accepted by SES to trial the Eliminating Violence Programme. The school set up an eliminating violence committee to formulate policies and practices, and work with parents. Over the years, different programmes (e.g., "hands and feet are useful tools") have been used. In the last 3–4 years, all staff have reached an agreed understanding of codes of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, and a consistent way of treating unacceptable behaviour. Staff have examined their own behaviour, as they believe that they themselves need to be good models of the kind of behaviour they appreciate in students. The current approach relies to a large extent on a rewards system, with Duffy books being prizes for students who are "caught being good". Time out is used, but there are no longer any detentions.

The perception that students' behaviour had improved under this programme was held by the principal, parents, the board chair, some teachers, and some support staff. They all thought that bullying occurred infrequently now, and students were more caring of each other. This contrasted with the past, where the school was portrayed as a "violent" school, according to the board chair.

However, the perceptions of Year 6 students were mixed, and were less positive than those of adults. These are reported in a later section, but they indicate that about a third of our Year 6 respondents hardly ever felt safe in the playground, and a third felt safe only sometimes.

Perceptions of the incidence of bullying, however, are much more positive.

As well as improving behaviour within the school, efforts have been made in the last 3–4 years to improve the physical environment by cleaning up rubbish, constructing an adventure playground, paying attention to health and safety, and painting the school. The renovations have had a positive impact on staff morale, according to one teacher: "When I first came, there were holes in the carpet. Safety things needed to be dealt with."

Whole School Development

This school does work in significant learning areas as a whole school, and uses outside support and advice to a large extent. In the last 3 years, it has had outside support in its involvement in the Eliminating Violence Programme, the Ministry of Education Literacy contract, and the Ministry of Education Pasifika Home-School Partnership Initiative. The school has worked with an adviser from School Support Services on the arts curriculum, a Reading Resource Teacher to establish a Parent Tutor Reading Programme, and a School Support Services adviser on the Early Numeracy Project. It was also part of an ICT project for low decile schools in the area with Learning Enhancement Associates. The ICT project was partly funded by the Ministry of Education. The principal said that he is making application for the school to be part of the Assessment for Better Learning Exemplar (Abel) project for next year.

Application to be part of the literacy and numeracy programmes arose after analysis of school-wide needs. The school's involvement in the Literacy contract from 2000 appears to have had significant effects.

In 1999, the school already had a focus on literacy, with 3 teachers trained in reading recovery and a reading recovery programme. The school places the poorest performers on the 6 year net on the Reading Recovery teacher's roll. She takes 4 students at a time. However, the principal said this by no means meets the needs, but the Ministry of Education funds only half the cost.

Since then, the most significant impact on teaching, learning, and assessment in respect to literacy seems to have come from 3 programmes:

- ongoing work on reading recovery;
- employment of a teacher from ESOL funding to work with target students to develop their English language ability;
- the Parent Tutor Reading Programme, which focuses on Years 5 and 6 students who are underachieving;
- the Literacy contract, where the school focused on written language.

With respect to reading achievement, the school's leader was concerned at the number of Years 5 and 6 students with poor reading skills. The school was not staffed to provide the individual attention each child needed. The literacy leader worked with a Reading Resource Teacher, who trained selected parents to become parent tutors, working individually with students. Currently 5 parents, chosen because of their own good command of English and their willingness to undertake training and follow the teacher's direction, are working with about 10 students a year. Their work takes 1.5 hours per week. Parent tutors are required to work in a way that shows respect for the student and the student's feelings, and to keep confidentiality.

The literacy leader co-ordinates the programme. She does a weekly running record with each student, and uses this to consider their strengths and weaknesses. She then makes a professional judgment on what to teach next, supplying written instructions to the parent tutor. (For example, her instructions for a parent tutor's work with one student were, "Go back, try that again and think what would go there." Her comment to support this instruction was "[Student] needs to re-read when it is difficult and suggest a word rather than an initial sound.") Once a term she meets with parent tutors to discuss concerns and successes. The programme aims to build understanding of text read. Students receive a certificate at the end of it.

Involvement in the Literacy contract was sought because of the strong view, held by teachers and principal alike, that a high standard of literacy is a basic goal of education, and a key goal for primary education. "To me, that first two years is the best shot they ever get at literacy and numeracy." (literacy leader) There have always been concerns about literacy at the school, partly because of the sparse resources and limited support for literacy in many homes, and also because of the high number of ESOL students.

In undertaking the Literacy Enhancement Project, the school worked with the literacy leader and external literacy facilitator during 2000 and 2001. The project was mandatory for all teachers, and involved Years 1–6 students. The teachers and principal thought that this involvement of all the staff was a feature of the project's success, because it meant that everyone would reinforce the same message and hold common information on students. The account below of how the programme operates within the school confirms that a common school-wide approach is indeed occurring.

This is how the project was approached:

- The external facilitator worked with the literacy leader and other staff to develop agreed goals and outcomes. Goals related to students, teachers, and school guidelines with respect to literacy teaching and learning. For example, a goal for students was to raise achievement levels in literacy, so that all students leaving the school are able to demonstrate reading, written language, and oral language skills at a level commensurate with national expectations for their age group and/or potential.

- The external facilitator ran a series of whole staff workshops on expectations, approaches to programme planning and assessment, and identifying what makes a good language classroom (reading and writing). Teachers then evaluated their strengths, interests, and needs with respect to literacy teaching and learning.
- The staff agreed to focus on written language for further work, as they identified this as an area of need.
- The external facilitator worked in each classroom, observing teachers working on written language. He gave feedback to each teacher.
- The external facilitator analysed the results of his observations and teachers' self-evaluations, and presented and discussed these with staff.
- The external facilitator and literacy leader held more whole staff workshops on challenges and needs that had been identified through this process.
- Benchmarks were created through a process of teachers analysing students' writing, and brainstorming exemplars of different levels. They worked in pairs, swapping and moderating each other's marking.
- The teachers, working with the external facilitator and literacy leader, devised criteria for each curriculum level of written language.
- Achievement information for reading was collected each term, and for written language at each age/class level in August-October 2000. Marking was moderated by the literacy leader and external facilitator. The external facilitator wrote a report on achievement to discuss with teachers.
- Achievement information against standards was collected again in March 2001, from a school-wide writing exercise where students all had the same instructions.
- Teachers working in their syndicates again marked the writing work according to the agreed criteria, and the literacy leader and external facilitator moderated the marking. The external facilitator presented achievement information to the school, analysing strengths and suggesting "teaching points".

The breakdown of achievement information by year level showed a marked improvement in achievement in written language for all age groups from their levels in 2000. For example, all age groups had a minimum of 10 percent improvement in achievement levels against expectations over this time. Years 1, 2, and 6 groups featured improvements of about 50 percent or more against expectations (external facilitator's report, 2001). Nevertheless, while all students in their first year were meeting or exceeding expected levels of achievement in written language, this percentage was much lower in higher year levels. "The whole school breakdown was not good." (principal) However, the analysis also showed that students who spent their whole time at the school were doing better than students from "outside", who may have been to 5 or more schools. Even ESOL students were achieving reasonably well if they had attended the school for 4 or 5 years. "This was reassuring. It showed we could target individual children." (literacy leader)

When the external facilitator left, the school made an agreement about what work the literacy leader would do to ensure that the work continued to progress. The school has since done further development work, and an assessment, marking, and moderation exercise was happening when this case study was being carried out.

The teaching staff, principal, office administrator, clerical assistant, teacher aide, and board chair all thought that the focus on literacy through the Literacy Enhancement Project was one of the most significant changes in the school, that it has had an impact on student learning, and that it has been one of the school's major achievements. It was interesting that it was only the parents who did not spontaneously mention this aspect of the school's achievement, maybe because their concerns were more about their own individual children.

The teaching staff attributed the success of the work to the following factors:

- An expert "outsider" came in, who could look with fresh eyes and who had up-to-date and sophisticated practical and theoretical knowledge.
- There was an open process where everyone "laid their cards on the table". It was not threatening. "We try to engender some feeling of trust. If it's hard going don't hide behind your desk. Sing out." (literacy leader)
- Observation, feedback, and excellent modelling were used, so that everyone got explicit feedback on their own teaching and could see useful ways of teaching. "I learned ideas about how to do things. Practical things on assessment." (experienced teacher)
- There was a collaborative process. It was a school-wide process, and everyone agreed on the same expectations and standards. "Everyone goes. Everyone is focused. We set goals. Everyone understands the way we are going and what we are doing. . . . Now we are all under the same umbrella." (experienced teacher)
- Teachers were driving it, and their benchmarks were constructed and agreed, not imposed.
- Expectations were set and passed on to the students. "If it's not up to scratch you don't put it on the wall." (beginning teacher)
- The analysis of data showed where students were meeting expectations and where they were not—as individuals, as year levels, and as a whole school. This enabled teachers to pinpoint where they needed to focus. The understanding from working with each other, the literacy leader, and the external facilitator helped teachers sharpen skills and approaches to their teaching in this area. "To me it's measurable, tangible and you can classify it." (literacy leader) "It changed the way we plan programmes and the actual programmes changed. Before we used to look globally. Now we set goals and specific outcomes and plan from the aims." (experienced teacher) "He told us things we could do better. Made us feel really good. How to pull that little bit more out of them. For example I'd model a full stop. He'd extend it to commas, two sentences. Does it make sense?" (beginning teacher)
- The money from being involved in the project was welcomed. "We spent $20,000 on books in the first year." (literacy leader)

The approach to professional development for the Early Numeracy Project was similar to the approach taken in the Literacy Enhancement Project, i.e., a whole school focus was followed, an outsider adviser was used, modelling was an important aspect, and delving below the surface to find out the child's thinking gave insights. Here the school worked with a cluster of other schools.

> [Professional development on numeracy had an impact on my work]. Knowing I had stuff to teach but not knowing how. I thought, 'Oh my God, so this is how you do it.' She taught my class, showed me how. It was actually easy, having it modelled. (beginning teacher)
>
> I didn't realise how much was involved in number. . . . You can teach different strategies. You have to ask [the students] what they think! (experienced teacher)

In this school, there had been no strong drive in the area of science, although goals are set by the school on a 2-year cycle. The science leader said that school resources are lacking, and that it would be good to bring someone else in from outside, such as a curriculum adviser.

Parent and Community Involvement

A feature of this school is its growing efforts to draw on the resources and strengths of the outside community.

The school seems to have succeeded in building local positive linkages with services for children and their families, especially CYFS, Specialist Education Services, Child, Adolescent and Family Counseling Service, the local hospital, and designated specialists such as the truancy officer and the social worker in schools. It works with wider community services, such as the Hosanna Church, Housing Corporation, and Police, especially Traffic and Youth Aid. Staff were positive about these contacts, although there was a view that CYFS staff are not as responsive as they could be, because of their high work loads.

Recently the school has been making special efforts to involve parent groups from Māori and Pasifika cultures in the work of the school. This is a significant challenge, because of the diversity of cultural backgrounds of students at the school. According to the principal, the school has in the past been criticised for its low level of spoken and written Māori language. The 1995 ERO assurance audit stated that "Māori language and culture studies should be an integral part of the delivery of the curriculum. This is not the case in most classrooms." However, the principal said that the school has been unable to attract teachers who are Māori speakers, although the school has Māori staff members. The school is reliant to some extent on involvement of parents for te reo and tikanga Māori.

For the last year, a group of largely Māori parents has been weaving tukutuku panels for the school, to replace those lost in the school fire, using a space in the corridor of one of the classroom blocks. This group became the nucleus for a consultation hui held in August 2001 and for consultation with the board.

The school has a Pasifika parent support group. At the end of the second term this year, the school began using the Pasifika Home-School Partnership programme to train 4 parent facilitators and 4 teacher support people to work with Pasifika parents. The facilitators are from Fiji, Samoa, Cook Islands, and Tokelau. The programme aims to endorse what families are doing for their children's development, learning and language, share ways in which they can have a bigger impact, and reinforce the fact that parents are the greatest influence on children's learning and development, and are essential to their success at school.

A first session run by the parent facilitators with the 4 teachers has been held. The school paid 2 students to care for children, and 30 parents attended. This was an introductory session to set the scene, and start parents thinking about how they can help their children's learning. It is too early to tell the impact of this initiative, but there is an air of optimism about the work. A Samoan grandmother told of her delight when the school bought a number of books in Pasifika languages for parents to borrow and take home to read to their children. "When the school supplied it, I am really happy. It's important for him [grandson] to know his identity. Us who come from so far away."

The school has also supported the establishment of a Samoan a'oga amata (early childhood centre) on its grounds, a move that the parents said they appreciate.

From the perspectives of the board chair and parents whom we interviewed, the school is a welcoming place. They thought this happens through a number of means. First, they thought the physical environment is welcoming. Comment was made about the school signage, which uses Māori and the seven Pasifika languages, and the "open playground" policy, which means that the playground is signposted as a public playground except during school sessions.

Secondly, they thought the staff and principal themselves have an open welcoming attitude and encourage involvement. "I don't have to book and make an appointment. I know if I needed to talk, they would be available." (parent) The things parents liked the most about the school were "being able to come in and feel comfortable and participate" and "the teachers' and principal's availability". The parents thought the school wants to provide opportunities to parents to support the school, and that parent initiative is encouraged. "If you have an idea they don't say 'no'."

In addition, the board chair thought the school and board had been brought together by the Literacy Contract. "It's buzzing. The school hums. We are all pulling together." The focus on literacy coincided with her own views that one of the most important things for children to learn at primary school is that "every child should be able to read and write".

One parent spoke of her satisfaction that her son, who had come from a kura kaupapa Māori and had not learned to read English, was not regarded as disadvantaged. "The support to transfer his skills was really good."

Parents liked the newsletters that came home regularly. However, they thought these could be extended with respect to learning, through the school giving more guidance on home activities that could support their children's learning. One parent also commented that some parents who had had bad experiences of school themselves did not like to get involved in the school.

External Context

The perceptions of all those whom we interviewed revealed how vulnerable the school is to outside social and economic factors. As a decile 1a school, families were seen to be deeply affected by these broader factors, which in turn impacted on students' well-being, health, and ability to learn.

Poverty is seen as a core problem in this school. Some children are not being fed and clothed appropriately. The school looks to local businesses to donate staple food items of bread and fruit, and to parents and community members for donations of clothing. Children are taught to prepare food. "There is a need for some children to make themselves a sandwich because no-one else will do it." (teacher)

The introduction by the current government of income-related rents from 1 December 2000 has enabled low-income families to rent good state housing in the area, and to remain in their housing without fear of unaffordable rent rises. This was perceived to have influenced transience and enrolments.

> When Housing Corporation changed the system [to market rentals], people moved away and the roll dropped. Housing Corporation changed again [to income-related rents]..Kids are coming back—their families are getting the subsidy. I think that's fair enough. No-one chooses to be on a benefit. (teacher)
>
> Rental incomes have stabilised. People are not moving out of the area. Lower housing costs means we have retained people. (parent)

One teacher thought more parents were in paid employment now than under the previous government.

The change in health policy under the previous government to provide free or low cost health care for under 6-year-olds had a noticeable impact at that time on very young children's health, according to the board chair. However, she says a "biggie" for the school is students who do not go to the doctor when they are sick, because of the cost of the visit or of the medicine. Because they are not treated, they also pass on illnesses to other students and staff. She would like to see free health care extended to primary aged children.

One teacher said some parents did not follow through when their child was referred for vision or hearing testing. "They get referred and parents don't take them. Is there another way? An itinerant vision and hearing tester is needed."

The teachers and principal in particular thought that the current government's education policy changes have had a positive impact on the school. These were:

- A greater sense of shared responsibility. "[Under the previous government] there was a feeling somehow that it was the school's fault that the community couldn't shape up." (principal)

- The abolition of bulk funding. This brought more funding to the school and a reduction in the sense of competition with other schools for students.
- The availability of professional development contracts, such as the Literacy Enhancement Project, Pasifika Literacy Initiative (Home-School Partnership), and Early Numeracy Project.

Teachers and principal thought that there are many students who are not eligible for support from the Specialist Education Services (now Group Special Education), but who would benefit from it. "At the moment because [students] are not extreme enough we don't get the resources and the help [from SES]." (teacher)

Some community developments were seen to have positively affected the school, in particular the involvement by a number of families in the local Hosanna church, whose facilities are also sometimes used by the school.

> Having relationships outside the school helps. We were already a community before we came. (parent)

> Quite a few of our families belong to the church. With some of our parents who have joined, they are more involved in education. And it is good for them and their confidence. (teacher)

All our participants were asked to identify major challenges to the school over the last 3–4 years. Many of these seemed to arise from factors that were largely outside the control of the school. Roll numbers and the transience of many of the students were seen as two big issues; these are discussed in a later section of this report.

School Funding

As a decile 1a school, the school receives decile-weighted Targeted Funding, Special Education Grant, and vandalism component of the operations grant. The school asks for $40 in activity fees for 1 child, $50 for 2 children and $60 for 3 or more. In the last financial year, it received $1325 in activity fees and $772 in donations from the community. Fund-raising by the Parent Support Group in the full 2001 year has raised $3,681, from sale of doughnuts ($186), school lunches ($400), photos ($537), raffle ($100), two discos ($697), and spellathon ($1,761). The principal said that this money heavily subsidises children to take part in school trips and activities.

Most of those whom we interviewed said that they thought the current funding levels are inadequate. Teachers spoke of the struggles to provide for learning needs:

> It's a constant struggle. We cannot meet the needs [for reading recovery] financially. We should be running it all day. (literacy leader)

> [What do I like least in the school?] The constant battle with funding. We need computers and a school hall. We are supposed to teach gymnasium out on the concrete. There is no conference room. We need furniture that functions properly. (teacher)

> The challenges are to do with economics. Stationery. Children having equipment to do school work. (teacher)

Parents described their efforts to fund-raise for basic school trips, such as going to the museum, which in higher decile schools would be funded by parent contributions. "We even have to squeeze to go on extra-curricular activities. It's just so stink."

The principal said what he liked least about working in this school was "the constant struggle for enough money to make a difference. Having to raise $150 for the bus to the museum is a worry, and to raise $500,000 for a school hall would pose extraordinary difficulties. A lot of money can provide educational experiences. This community could do so much with a hall. They [Ministry of Education} reckon because of the nature of open plan we have all the space we need."

The principal and one of the teachers described their experience with establishing their ICT server and network as problematic. The network server was supposed to cost $14,943. The actual cost to the date of our interviews was about $25,000. Part of the problem was that the school had to replace the 5 computers that they had intended to use. The technicians also had problems in setting up the network.

> There were major hiccups. Computers crashed and technicians kept coming in. We didn't have the funding. Telecom put the lines in but there were problems. The Ministry said 'You have to have ICT' but they don't give you the resources. . . . We had major challenges as a staff—we have to cover for new curriculum areas and ICT. We didn't have the funding so we were put back a couple of years. (teacher)

This school would have been helped by being part of a national computer network and servicing system, where costs were standardised. In September 2001, the Minister of Education announced a licensing deal with Microsoft New Zealand to provide all state and integrated schools with computer software, to start from the beginning of 2002, free of charge. However, this presupposes that schools have the hardware already, and would not have helped with these difficulties.

Since the government reversed the policy on bulk funding of teachers' salaries, the school has been better off. It will receive $59,936 in redistributed bulk funding through the operations grant in 2002. The principal explained that the school did not go into bulk funding partly because, as an employer of experienced teachers, it would have been worse off.

Students' Views of their Experiences at School

Most Year 6 students were positive about the clear explanations, help, and feedback they received from teachers on school-work tasks. They were more divided in their views of whether teachers listen to what they say, whether they liked their teacher, and whether teachers treated them fairly.

Views of student behaviour and students' own feelings of safety were variable. Most thought that "Students behave well in my class" only sometimes. Views about whether they felt safe in the playground ranged almost equally from usually to never/hardly ever. However, the very high percentage of students (81 percent) who said they never/hardly ever get bullied suggests that the bullying programme is largely effective. This response compares favourably with responses to the same question in the Competent Children study by a sample of 505 10-year-olds in the Wellington region (Wylie, Thompson, and Lythe, 2001), where 62 percent of the children said they were never bullied, 31 percent said they were sometimes bullied, 6 percent said they were often bullied, and 1 percent said they were always bullied.

Year 6 students had mixed attitudes to learning. They were likely to think they could do better work if they tried, although, on the other hand, few said they got tired of trying. Most saw the relevance of at least some of their learning, and responded "usually or sometimes" to "I can learn what I need for the future".

For most, school was a good place most of the time. Only one person usually felt lonely, most remarked that they always had good friends, and most always enjoyed themselves.

The things Year 6 students liked best about the school were:

- School work or specific school subjects (10 students), e.g., "School work e.g., maths, reading, handwriting, silent reading, and Harry Potter", "get lots of work", "maths, reading, and art".
- Friends (4 students).
- Games, sport and/or PE (4 students).
- Playing on computer (3 students).
- Free time (2 students).

The high rating for school work or subject areas shows that many students find learning enjoyable.

The things Year 6 students would like to change in the school were:

- Teachers (4 students), e.g., "The teachers that are mean"; "Teachers to be nice. Treat us like a real person"; "Miss [name] and Miss [name]".
- Rules (4 students).
- Not to get bullied or hit (3 students).
- Listen to own music or stereo (3 students).
- Playground (2 students), e.g., "More trees, courts, soccer goals", "soccer goals".
- More PE or more fun and games (2 students).

Year 4 students generally liked their school, had a sense of belonging, and thought their teacher was kind to them. Most said that their teacher usually told them when they did good work. The majority thought the teacher usually helped them do good work, although almost half thought this happened only sometimes.

Most Year 4 students said they tried hard at their work, although fewer of them usually liked their work.

A small majority usually felt safe in the playground and most thought children behave well only sometimes.

Year 4 students were asked to write what they liked best about their school. In contrast to Year 6 students, school work or specific subjects were not popular choices:

- Teacher/s (9 students).
- Sport, e.g., rugby, soccer and/or games, playing (9 students).
- Friends (8 students).
- Playground (3 students).
- School work (2 students).

We asked Year 4 students to write down what they would like to change about their school. Many gave identical responses, suggesting that they had collaborated on these answers. The most desired changes were about physical aspects of the school:

- Playground (14 students)—some came up with specific items they would like in the playground, i.e., rugby posts, soccer nets, volleyball court, and tennis courts and T-ball. 5 students said they would like to change "the field".
- "Classroom" (7 students).
- School (6 students), e.g., "the whole school", "school".
- Nothing (3 students).
- "Harder work", "work" (2).
- Staff, i.e., "the school principal", "my teacher".
- Student fighting (1).
- Toilets (1).

Teachers' Views

Profile of Teachers Who Completed Surveys

Sex	Female	9
Position	Classroom teacher	5
	Part-time teacher	1
	Assistant principal	1
	Deputy principal	
	Senior teacher	1
	RTLB	1
Years of teaching experience	Less than 2	1
	2–4 years	1
	5–10 years	4
	11–20 years	3
	21 plus years	1

Years at Puriri School	Less than 2	2
	2–4 years	1
	5–10 years	4
	11–20 years	1
	21 plus years	1
Qualifications	Diploma of Teaching (5), Bachelor of Teaching, Advanced Diploma of Teaching and Diploma ESSTN, Advanced Diploma of Teaching (2), Bachelor of Arts	
Membership of professional organisations	NZEI (5), Resource Teachers Learning and Behaviour Association	

The clearest and strongest agreement of teachers to our survey was with a set of items related to teaching and learning: a belief that the school's focus is on learning, that teachers believe students can learn, that success is celebrated, and that teachers regularly monitor the learning and progress of individual students. This finding is in accordance with school priorities, teachers' attitudes, and teaching practices.

There was also agreement with a further set of items related to students: the setting of challenging achievement standards, student clarity about behavioural standards, provision of extra-curricular activities, respect for students and display of their work, and provision of constructive feedback to students.

A second set of items to which there was largely agreement or strong agreement related to how teachers work: collaboration in planning, support from colleagues, availability of senior staff to discuss curriculum matters. Most teachers strongly agreed or agreed that "Teachers like working in the school", suggesting there is generally a satisfied group of teaching staff (only one teacher took a middle position).

Finally, there was largely agreement or strong agreement to statements that the school is one where adults learn as well as students, and where parent involvement and good community relationships are fostered.

The items on which teachers gave a range of variable responses and were less positive or equivocal were related to involvement by teachers, support staff, and students in development of the strategic plan; communication by senior staff of a clear vision of where the school is going; and whether decision-making processes are fair. These results suggest that perhaps the school could look at its processes of strategic plan development.

Finally, there were variable and largely equivocal responses to the statement "Teachers regularly observe each other in the classroom", reflecting perhaps that this practice occurs at some times only, e.g., during the Literacy Enhancement Project work, or for beginning teachers.

The second part of our questionnaire asked teachers to respond to items related to change over the last 3–4 years. One teacher had been at the school for less than 2 years, and often responded "don't know" to these questions, and three teachers did not respond.

Teachers were very positive about changes on all items except "We have more contact with other schools now". This tallies with our interview material, where contact with community and outside agencies was a strong feature, but contact with other schools was not.

For teachers, the achievements of the school over the last 3–4 years were:

- Concentration on literacy and numeracy (3)
- Behaviour management success (1)/more positive safe environment (1)
- More parent involvement (2)
- Working as a team/unified approach to goals (2)
- New DP (1).

Teachers thought the current strengths of the school were:

- Harmonious staff relationships (2)/teacher support from all staff (1)/positive environment (1)/RTLB welcomed and valued (1)
- Strong teaching teams (1)/strength of staff working to set goals (1)/school-wide approach (1)
- Strong/good senior management team (2)
- Behaviour improvements (2)
- New DP (1)
- Planning and assessment of children's work (1)
- Extra curricular activities (1)
- Pasifika Initiative, Parent Support Group (1)
- Literacy, culture, sports, art (1)
- "Making the most of what we've got"(1).

Teachers would like to see the following changes in the school over the next couple of years:

- New hall (3)
- Classroom and/or teacher furniture (2)/"Furniture that works—cupboards with door locks, chairs for each child"
- Smaller class sizes or better ratios (2)
- Changes in level of behaviour accepted (1)/set discipline plan (1)
- More money to support extreme number of high needs students (1)
- Staff involved in decisions (1)
- New modes of operation (1)
- More interaction with schools in the area (1)
- Continuity of strong able practitioners (1)
- ICT available and implemented (1)
- Art supplies (1).

Support Staff Views

Profile of Support Staff Who Completed Surveys

Sex	Female	5
Position	Teacher aide	4
	Office assistant	1
Years at Puriri School	Less than 2	3
	2–4 years	
	5–10 years	2
	11–20 years	
	21 plus years	
Qualifications	BA (Hons), 6th Form Certificate	
Membership of professional organisations	NZEI	

Support staff were very positive about most items, with none disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with any, except one item. They were unanimous in their strong agreement with 4 items related to what could be called "a learning ethic" within the school, based on an overarching concern for learning, and respect, encouragement, and high expectations for all students. The fifth item on which they were in strong agreement was their own liking for working in the school. This suggests that the school is a good place for support staff.

Six of the 9 items on which most support staff were in strong agreement also related to learning. The view emerging from responses to these items was of the school as a "learning community", where adults as well as students learn during and outside of school time, there are consistent standards for school work and behaviour, and success is celebrated.

Two other items formed a set relating to positive recognition of support staff and their feeling of involvement within the life of the school. The third item showed a belief that staff promote good relationships with the community.

Most support staff agreed with items related to positive communication and decision-making processes: the extent to which there is clarity of communication about standards of work and behaviour, openness of communication within the school, and opportunities for involvement in forums for discussion about key goals. They also agreed with items suggesting there is clarity for parents about standards of work and behaviour, students are enthusiastic about learning, and staff are committed to the whole school.

Support staff were positive, but to a lesser degree, on items related to communication and respect among staff, and support for new staff.

The lowest, but still positive ratings were given to items related to student respect for staff, staff participation in important decision making, support staff input into the school strategic plan, and whether time at staff meetings is spent on important things.

The most variability was in response to the statement, "Staff development time is used effectively in the school".

Three support staff responded to items about change over the last 3–4 years.

Support staff were very positive about changes, except that there was uncertainty or disagreement on the item, "Parents show more interest in their children's learning". It may be that support staff are not in a good position to assess this.

For support staff, the achievements of the school over the last 3–4 years were seen to be:

- Literacy programme (2)
- Parent involvement increased (2)
- A settled environment and a base from which students can learn (1)
- Numeracy programme (1).

Support staff thought strengths were:

- Parent support and involvement (3)
- Excellent dedicated teachers (2)
- Literacy programme (2)
- Numeracy programme (2).

Support staff would like to see the following changes:

- Hall (2)
- Classroom furniture (2)
- Caring for grounds (1)
- More parent involvement (1).

The most frequently recorded items for change from both support staff and teachers were items requiring funding: a new hall and furniture. In addition, teachers wanted some curriculum resources (art supplies, ICT), and extra staffing to improve group size and special needs assistance. Taken alongside the information on funding in a previous section, this adds some weight to the views that the school operates under a high level of financial hardship.

Challenges for the Future

Participants were asked what major challenges lie ahead for the school. The following were described:

- Sufficient funding to meet the needs of the school, including to buy curriculum resources (6)
- Keeping up roll numbers (5)
- Maintaining good communication between different cultural groups (3), involving parents (1), and community (1)
- Maintaining the momentum of positive development (3)
- Managing any staff changes (2)
- Dealing with transient students (1)
- Building a hall (1).

One teacher asked whether the school is trying to do too much at once in curriculum areas.

> Is doing all the contracts in one year too much? Probably. In the last year we did numeracy, literacy, arts, IT. I coped—only just.

The two most commonly expressed challenges are in areas that are largely outside the control of the school, namely enrolments, which depend to an extent on demographic factors, and school funding.

There is a view that the changes the school has made so far are positive ones. Keeping on track and with similar enthusiasm and pace will require good leadership, especially as some staff changes are expected in the new year.

Summary

The Puriri School staff reported improvement in student behaviour and in learning and teaching. In addition, there is evidence of a deepening involvement in the school by parents and community groups, as a result of deliberate efforts to engage Māori parents in tukutuku weaving and Pasifika parents in learning issues.

The school focused its goals for change on specific areas. It tackled behaviour issues first, and seems to have succeeded in eliminating most bullying, although it could go further in becoming a safe environment for all students.

A feature is the work carried out on a school-wide basis to make essential learning areas a priority. There are agreed expectations about student learning, developed through analysis and discussion. The teaching staff systematically collect rigorous data to show achievement levels. The data is now analysed from the perspective of both individual students and groups of students (e.g., by year level, ethnicity, gender, attendance at number of schools). The data is compared with teachers' expectations for student learning, and there is professional development to assist teachers to develop their classroom teaching practice.

The success of the school's approach to professional development seems to arise from a number of features:

- the "ownership" of goals and expectations;
- the use of an outside "professional" who had deep practical and theoretical knowledge of the curriculum area, and was able to provide specific feedback and modelling to teachers as individuals and as a group;
- the emphasis on developing actual teaching practice to make changes at the classroom level;
- the "whole school" open and collaborative approach;
- the reference points of hard data to determine change and priorities.

The school now faces challenges of consolidating and continuing to move ahead in student learning, taking on new staff and getting them involved, and maintaining an approach that seems to work well for it (while not doing too much).

The efforts being made to involve parents more in the life of the school and in their children's education are at an early stage. Time will tell to what extent these efforts have opened the school to wider involvement, and had an impact on parents' contributions to their children's learning.

This case study suggests the dependence of the school on external systems and policies to anchor and sustain it. Adequate school funding, access to good professional development, capacity to build strong positive working relationships with other agencies working in the local community, and availability of specialist support were all seen as influential in enhancing the work of the school. It brings home the importance of targeting additional resources to schools in such circumstances.

The circumstances of families, including their own educational experiences, their income, cultural background, housing, and employment status become part of the context in which the school needs to work. Schools can be assisted by humane social and economic policies that support families with the work of raising young children.

Table 13

Year 6 Students' Views of Their Experience at School (n=16)

School is a place where	Mostly	Sometimes	Never/hardly ever
I have good friends	14	1	1
I enjoy myself	12	4	0
My teacher tells me when I do good work	12	4	0
I could do better work if I tried	11	4	1
The rules are fair	11	3	2
Teachers explain things clearly to me	10	6	0
Teachers help me to improve my work	10	4	2
I get all the help I need	9	7	0
I can learn what I need for the future	8	6	2
Teachers treat me fairly	8	6	2
I keep out of trouble	7	8	1
I learn most things pretty quickly	6	9	1
I feel safe in the playground	6	5	5
I do interesting things	6	5	5
I like my teachers	5	9	2
Teachers listen to what I say	5	8	3
I get upset	4	9	3
Students behave well in my class	3	13	0
I get a hard time	3	9	4
I get tired of trying	2	7	7
I feel restless	2	6	8
I get bored	1	10	5
I get bullied	1	2	13

Table 14

Year 4 Students' Views of Their Experience at School (n=27)

School is a place where	Mostly	Sometimes	Never/hardly ever	No response
I like my school	26	1	0	
My teacher is kind to me	26	1	0	
I belong in this school	24	2	0	1
I try hard at school	23	4	0	
My teacher tells me when I do good work	23	4	0	
My teacher is fair to me	23	1	2	1
I feel safe in the playground	15	10	1	1
I like my work	15	9	0	3
My teacher helps me do better work	14	10	0	3
Children in my class behave well	3	24	0	

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Table 15

Teachers' Views of Their School (n=9)

The school now	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	No response
Teachers regularly monitor the learning and progress of individual children	8	1			
Teachers in this school believe that all students can learn	7	1	1		
Senior staff openly recognise teachers when they do things well	4	2	3		
The primary concern of everyone in the school is student learning	6	2	1		
Student success is regularly celebrated in this school	6	1	2		
Staff encourage students to try their best	5	4			
Every attempt is made to set challenging standards of achievement for each student	5	3	1		
Students are clear about standards of behaviour expected in the school	5	3	1		
Teachers like working in the school	5	3	1		
Teachers believe that all children can be successful	5	3		1	
Extra curricular activities provide valuable opportunities for all students	5	2	1		1
Teachers respect students	4	5			
Staff in this school work hard to promote and maintain good relations with the community	4	5			
Teachers regularly collaborate to plan their teaching	4	5			
Adults (teachers) as well as students learn in this school	4	5			
If staff have a problem with their teaching they usually turn to colleagues for help	4	4	1		
Students' work is prominently displayed	4	4	1		
Senior staff are available to discuss curriculum/teaching matters	4	4	1		
The staff encourage parents to be involved in the school	4	4	1		
Expectations about school work are communicated clearly to all students	4	4	1		
Staff ensure that students receive constructive feedback about their work	4	4	1		
The school development plan includes practical ways of evaluating success in achieving goals and targets	4	3	1		1
Teachers regularly discuss ways of improving students' learning	3	5	1		
New staff are well supported in this school	3	5	1		
Staff have a commitment to the whole school and not just their class or syndicate	3	5	1		
Teachers in this school believe that all students can be successful	3	5		1	
Teachers pay attention to keeping the school environment attractive	3	5	1		
Disruption in classes is dealt with promptly so that learning for all students can proceed	3	5		1	
Whole school meetings are worthwhile	3	4	2		
There is mutual respect between staff and senior staff in this school	3	4	1		1
Staff participate in important decision making	3	3	3		
Teachers encourage students to be independent learners	2	6	1		
Staff feel encouraged to bring forward new ideas	2	6	1		
Staff development time is used effectively in the school	2	5	2		
Non-teaching staff feel involved in the life of the school	2	5	2		
At staff meetings time is spent on important things rather than on minor issues	2	4	3		
There is effective communication between senior staff and teachers	2	4	3		
Teachers have a say in topics selected for the school's staff development programme	2	3	3		1
The Board of Trustees plays a significant role in supporting developments within the school	2	3	3	1	
Students in this school are enthusiastic about learning	1	7	1		
The school communicates clearly to parents the standard of work it expects from students.	1	6	2		

The school now	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	No response
There is regular staff discussion about how to achieve school goals and targets	1	6	2		
Teachers have a say in the school strategic plan	1	6	1	1	
Decision-making processes are fair	1	6	1	1	
Standards set for students are consistently upheld across the school	1	5	3		
Teachers share similar beliefs and attitudes about effective teaching/learning	1	5	2		1
Parents are clear about behaviour standards expected in school	1	4	4		
Non-teaching staff have input into the school strategic plan	1		4	3	1
There is effective communication among teachers		7	2		
The school allows staff joint planning time		7	1		1
Students respect teachers		6	2		1
The senior staff communicate a clear vision of where the school is going		6	2	1	
Teachers regularly observe each other in the classroom and give each other feedback		3	5	1	
Students have some say in the school strategic plan		1	5	3	

Table 16

Support Staff Views of Their School (n=5)

The school now	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	No response
Teachers respect students	5				
Staff encourage students to try their best	5				
The primary concern of everyone in the school is student learning	5				
Support staff like working in the school	5				
Teachers in the school believe all students can learn	5				
Staff in the school work hard to promote and maintain good relations with the community	4				1
Teachers believe that all children can be successful	4	1			
Adults as well as students learn in this school	4	1			
Support staff feel involved in the life of the school	4	1			
Standards set for students are consistently upheld across the school	4	1			
Senior staff openly recognise support staff when they do things well	4	1			
Student success is regularly celebrated in this school	4	1			
Extra-curricular activities provide valuable opportunities for all students	4	1			
Students are clear about standards of behaviour expected in the school	4		1		
Decision-making processes are fair	3	2			
Whole school meetings are worthwhile	3				2
Staff feel encouraged to bring forward new ideas	3	2			
Parents are clear about behaviour standards expected in the school	3	1	1		
Students in this school are enthusiastic about learning	3	2			
Staff have a commitment to the whole school and not just their class or syndicate	3	1			1
The school communicates clearly to parents the standard of work it expects from students	3	2			
There is regular staff discussion about how to achieve school goals/targets	3	2			
Students' work is prominently displayed	3	2			
Disruption in classes is dealt with promptly so that learning for all students can proceed	3	2			
The staff encourage parents to be involved in the school	3	1			1
The Board of Trustees plays a significant role in supporting developments within the school	3	2			
New staff are well supported in this school	2	3			
There is effective communication among staff	2	3			
There is mutual respect between staff and senior staff in this school	2	3			
The senior staff communicate a clear vision of where the school is going	2	2	1		
Teachers in this school believe that all students can be successful	2	3			
The school development plan includes practical ways of evaluating success	2	2			1
Students respect staff	1	4			
Staff participate in important decision making	1	3			1
Staff pay attention to keeping the school environment attractive	1	4			
Support staff have input into the school strategic plan	1	3	1		
At staff meetings time is spent on important things rather than on minor issues	1		3		1
Staff development time is used effectively in the school	1	1		1	2

Table 17

Teachers' Views of Change Over the Last 3–4 Years (n=9)

Change over the last 3–4 years	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Don't know	No response
We have made positive changes to the way we teach	7	1			1	
We have made positive changes to the way the school runs	7	1			1	
We have more professional development	7		1		1	
Student behaviour has improved	6		2		1	
We expect more of our students	5	3			1	
We enjoy our work more	5	3			1	
We monitor our progress more	5	3			1	
We have made positive changes to how we plan ahead	5	2	1		1	
We acknowledge children's cultures more	4	3	1		1	
Parents show more interest in their children's learning	3	4	1		1	
We make more use of te reo Māori	2	5	1		1	
We have more contact with other schools	1		5	1	1	1

Table 18

Support Staff Views of Change Over the Last 3–4 Years (n=5)

Change over the last 3–4 years	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Don't know	No response
We expect more of our students	4	1				
We acknowledge children's culture more	4	1				
We enjoy our work more	3	2				
We have made positive changes to the way the school runs	3	1			1	
We have made positive changes to how we plan ahead	3		1		1	
Student behaviour has improved	2	3				
We have more professional development	2	2			1	
We make more use of te reo Māori	1	2		1		1
We monitor our progress more	1	2			2	
Parents show more interest in their children's learning			4	1		

FREEDOM SCHOOL

Introduction

Freedom School Profile

School type	Contributing primary	
Roll size	395	
Decile rating	7	
Locality	Suburban	
Student ethnicity	European	– 71%
	Māori	– 10%
	Korean	– 4%
	Pasifika	– 5%
	Other	– 10%
Staffing entitlement	16.70	
Actual staffing	16 full-time, 3 part-time, 4 special needs teachers	
Recommended	ICT lead school. Recommended by a local principal and college of education lecturers. The principal was described as "vocal and go ahead" and the school as "widely respected".	

Freedom School is a contributing school situated on land surrounded by bush and reserves. The local community centre is adjacent to the school, and the kindergarten adjoins the school grounds. The area has traditionally been one of first home ownership where families tend to sell and move on when their children approach intermediate school age. The profile of the community has changed in recent years, as a greater proportion of homes are rental properties. The number of children who move schools often has also increased in recent years. Of the Pasifika children, 4 percent are described as Samoan, and 1 percent as Tongan. The 10 percent "other" includes 3 percent Middle Eastern and 1 percent African.

This school's fees are $80 per child per year, reducing to $65 for subsequent children.

The school is organised into three syndicates, junior, middle, and senior, each with a team leader. There are 16 full-time teachers, 3 part-time teachers, 4 special needs teachers, 3 teacher aides, 3 support staff, and a caretaker and gardener.

The principal, who has been leader of the school for 8 years, says it was a good school when he was appointed. There was no need for immediate and dramatic changes. Development has been purposeful and strategic.

In recent years, efforts have been made to improve the environment of the school. Playground facilities and gardens have been upgraded, and new buildings and revitalized work and storage areas have been built. An attractive new administration area, built 18 months ago, contains a large reception area, office manager's and principal's offices, sickbay, and meeting room. The school has a new gymnasium and attached music room, funded by outside grants and the Ministry of Education financial assistance scheme.

There is a large reading resource room, containing rolling shelving which stores all of the school's reading resources. In an area which once housed toilets and cloak bay, there is an exceptionally well-stocked resource room, which is staffed by a resource manager for 20 hours a week. Teachers have access to photocopying, binding, and laminating services. Other areas include an area for teaching art, a teachers' resource room, and a room for teachers' aides.

The school environment is dynamic and exciting, with classrooms showcasing children's writing, artwork, and investigations. The standard of wall displays is extremely high, creating attractive and lively learning areas. The library is an aesthetically pleasing and stimulating area, with comfortable seating, displays of children's artwork, and extensive book resources, as well as access to indexes and encyclopedias on the library's three computers. The school is developing a parent section in the library. Off the library is the Compaq information and technology suite, where children are able to access the internet and CD ROMS to gather information, and use software programmes to present their work.

There are many opportunities for children to participate in a wide range of school activities, including sports teams, and bi-annual musical productions. While we were at the school, there was a buzz of excitement and anticipation, as all of the children in the junior syndicate were preparing for their show, rewritten from a traditional African tale by one of the teachers. Later the executive officer told us that, "The show was a huge success with full houses both nights, the children were delightful and the set spectacular. The junior syndicate staff had all worked so hard, they thoroughly deserved all the acclaim they received."

Because the school strongly emphasises structured and focused teaching throughout the first 2 years of schooling, teachers indicated that most children who have been in the school since the start of their education acquire basic skills which allow them to progress well throughout the school. The achievement profile of Māori children is similar to that of non-Māori. To ensure that the school addresses individual learning needs, there are additional opportunities for children who are gifted and talented in particular curriculum areas, as well as booster programmes, typically for children new to the school who need additional support with their learning.

The school was previously directly resourced for teachers' salaries, and gained $130,000 in its three years in the scheme.

Developments in this school of greatest significance in the last 3 years have largely been the result of partnerships with business. The school is a "Sunshine School of Excellence" and a Compaq Lead School. All of those interviewed consider that these partnerships have enhanced the level of resourcing available to the school (a school-wide reading programme, and computers), as well as providing professional development that has improved learning and teaching.

The partnership with Sunshine Books has provided the school with school-wide reading material that is selectively integrated with literacy programmes. The Sunshine partnership also provides mathematics resources, which teachers consider integrate well with the government's Early Numeracy Project.

The Sunshine partnership has also provided ongoing professional development to encourage teachers to include a wide range of ICT tools in their day-to-day classroom teaching. Teachers spoke positively about the introduction of ICT and the benefits it had for children's learning.

The school has been chosen as an ICT Lead school, with the responsibility for the co-ordination of professional development and support for ICT in a cluster of other schools. The principal believes strongly in sharing professional expertise across schools, and commented positively on recent initiatives which encourage systemic improvement, rather than competition. Another school development has been the introduction of management structures which have encouraged leadership across the school. Team leaders now have much greater responsibilities to support and develop staff in their areas. According to teachers, this has "assisted with more open communication and discussion of educational issues".

The school was selected as an improving school on the basis of a recommendation from another principal, from College of Education lecturers, and on examination of previous ERO reports. The principal was described as "vocal, and go ahead" and the school as "widely respected" in the local area.

The ERO report in 2001 commented that "The principal's leadership style is a positive factor in the operation of the school. He is approachable for both staff and children. He facilitates reflective practice and appropriately models positive values and qualities with staff, children and the community. His open and facilitative approach provides a good example for all who work with him."

In this school we interviewed the principal, the board chair, 6 teachers (including the associate principal, syndicate leaders, literacy leader, and science leader), the executive officer, 2 teacher aides, and 2 parents. We also observed a demonstration literacy lesson with a group of 25 visiting teachers from Thailand.

Teachers are enthusiastic about their work with children. They talked about inspiring a love of learning, and about wanting children to be excited about the work they did at school. There was strong evidence that teachers encouraged the development of independence in children; even new entrants were encouraged to choose books independently, select their own activities, and make decisions about their learning daily.

Teachers also described the school as a family school, with events such as flower shows, daffodil days, school picnics, and shared lunches and morning teas. While parents are welcome in the school, day-to-day parental involvement in the school is not high.

Five major features appear to characterise the way this school sees itself, its students and its community:

- School climate;
- Values and relationships;
- Focus on learning;
- Professional development;
- Home-school links.

School Climate

Teachers, parents, support staff, and the board chair all spoke warmly about the school climate, describing it having a "happy tone", as "family oriented", and as operating with "the heart as well as the head".

Four people referred to the pride that they felt in the school, mentioning that the confidence and courtesy demonstrated by children was frequently commented upon by visitors, parents, and people outside the school. The board chair commented on the initiative shown by the school:

> It's a forward moving school; it's not afraid to do things. Some traditionalists might disapprove of the sponsorship we've got involved in, but it has really enhanced the education we can offer.

Children with special needs are integrated fully into classroom programmes, and are given opportunities to share in leadership roles. A parent of a child with special needs told us how the school was prepared to "think outside the square" to meet the needs of her child in ways she described as innovative. For example, we observed her child testing the spelling of a younger child in the classroom, thereby reinforcing his own knowledge, while acting in a leadership role.

The visibility of the principal was commented on positively by parents, who considered that he made a point of being in the playground at 3.00 pm each day to be available to parents, and that he appeared to know the names of all the children.

Relationships between the board of trustees and the staff are positive. An example of this while we were there was the humorous "unveiling" of a plaque on a new wall in the junior syndicate, which the associate principal (WD) had lobbied the board to approve for some time. The wall now has a brass plaque inscribed "The WD wall: a tribute to perseverance, determination, endurance and persistence."

Many of the aspects of the school culture are also evidenced in the values and relationships described in the next section.

Values and Relationships

According to the principal, the nurturing of positive relationships is given top priority in the school, because in his view, effective learning occurs in the context of positive relationships. Seven of those interviewed specifically mentioned the "golden rule" (treat others as you would wish to be treated) as being *the* core value of the school.

Several people described how the ethic of care and concern for others is frequently talked about, modelled, and rewarded. The principal presents awards at weekly assemblies to children who have demonstrated giving up their time to help others. The school sponsors a child from an underdeveloped country, and has one charity project each term.

The principal considers that he has an open management style, and he is willing to listen to all points of view, although he will not necessarily agree with staff. "I had to teach staff early on that being listened to doesn't necessarily mean being agreed with," he said.

He makes a point of not burdening teachers with unnecessary information, preferring to let teachers know information when they need to know it.

All of the staff model courteous and polite interactions with each other and with the children. Most of those interviewed highlighted the importance placed on showing respect for others.

Children are valued and cherished. Most people interviewed identified "children" as being what they liked most about the school, making comments such as:

> Teachers are really into seeing kids do well. (principal)
>
> What's best? The kids. They just make it. The improvement they make over the year. (teacher)
>
> Children and what happens to them matters. (principal)
>
> Children are valued, and they don't let you down. (teacher)

Most of those interviewed emphasised that good behaviour is a prerequisite for effective learning. Three people specifically shared their impression that when the school's previous deputy principal retired 3 years ago, behaviour standards in the senior school slipped. It was not until this occurred that staff realised the importance of her leadership in this area. A concerted effort has been made to re-establish expectations and improve behaviour. This has highlighted the importance of common expectations for, and acknowledgment of, positive behaviour.

One of the ways that new students to the school now learn the school expectations for behaviour is the use of a buddy system. The need for children to learn to do things "The Freedom Way" was commented upon by the principal and by several staff members. Children who fall short of the standards are reminded of expectations by comments such as "That's not how we behave at Freedom."

Teachers work at establishing high levels of student engagement from the start of children's schooling. Children are taught to sit still and attend during instruction so that learning opportunities are not missed.

> In a shared reading situation they're not going to learn if they are fiddling. They have to have their eyes to us, their hands in their laps. Children rise to the expectation. New children learn the expectations and other children soon bring them into line. Even children say "You're not a Freedom girl, we don't expect that from Freedom children." (teacher)

Three teachers told us that when children come into the classrooms before school in the mornings, they are expected to organise their materials, and to begin work on a self-selected task. Their rationale is that this settles the children and ensures that they are focused on learning from the start of the day.

Focus on Learning

The school mission statement is "learning is freedom" and the overriding concern of staff is to be fully focused on learning. The school goals are:

1. To provide our children with strategies to help them cope with daily life in a modern society and become life long learners.
2. To provide opportunities for our children to enhance their self esteem, pride, confidence, and a sense of responsibility.
3. To encourage sound learning habits through the best programme for each individual.
4. To encourage and foster community support.

The strategic goals of the school have been developed in consultation with staff and the wider school community. This information is obtained by questionnaire and public meetings.

Teachers believe that all children can learn, given the right teaching and encouragement. The general ethos of the school is one that expects a lot from children. Students are expected to revisit work until they and their teachers are satisfied that it is the best they can do. This is particularly evident in the standard of children's art work. One teacher stressed how the children are "pushed for more and more". She had come to the school relatively recently, and has been shown that it is possible for even young children to learn at much higher levels than she had previously thought possible.

Many of those interviewed talked about giving children tools for learning so that they could become independent critical thinkers. There were 12 comments made about the importance of encouraging and guiding children so that they learnt to become self-directed learners. Student selection and ownership of tasks is fostered from the start of schooling. Teachers viewed students as active agents in their learning and encouraged them to develop greater responsibility for their learning. For example, teachers do not set formal homework, but expect all children to build on their day's learning at home. All children are required to read every night, and then to devise an activity which extends an aspect of their learning from school or home. Younger children are encouraged to bring news or items from home that can be built on in class. Teachers talked about wanting the children to actively work with knowledge to develop personal understanding, rather than completing a teacher-designed activity.

The school aims to provide an integrated curriculum, with an emphasis on literacy and numeracy, and the development of thinking skills. Teachers welcomed the changing of the NAGs, as it has allowed them to give priority to the teaching of literacy and numeracy in the early years. There is a strong focus on intensive literacy teaching from the beginning of school. The expectation is that all children will be reading at their chronological age by the end of their first year, and most children reach or exceed this expectation.

Although other curriculum areas such as science are taught, they are seen primarily as contexts for the development of higher-order skills and processes, rather than for the acquisition of facts. The science leader told us that because science is not a planned curriculum focus until 2003, she has offered little in the way of leadership this year. Extensive use is made of non-fiction topic books within the literacy programme to encourage informal opportunities to learn science concepts.

In the junior syndicate, children are not grouped in formal ability groups ("the 4 group syndrome"), as teachers consider that this lowers expectations for the slower-progress children. "If a child is a starfish it is very unlikely it will be a frog," said one teacher. Instead there is an emphasis on children learning from tightly structured and focused teacher demonstration and modelling in shared reading sessions, with temporary groups that are brought together based on identified learning needs. Each child also has an individualised reading programme. Children know which "book-boxes" contain reading material suited to their level, and they are encouraged to choose their own books, and their own reading activities.

Teachers have organised classrooms in ways that allow them to engage with individuals as well as with teaching groups. This has increased the time available for teachers to focus on the individual strengths and needs of children, and to have meaningful conversations with them about their learning. Teachers in the junior syndicate have a very clear sense of what individual children's needs are, and this allows them to bring small groups together for specific purposes. As teachers regularly work one-to-one with children, children can be assisted to see where their next learning steps are. Children are expected to improve; they will be asked "What can you do better next time?" To emphasise the importance of learning, the principal tries to apportion 15 percent of his time to interacting with children in their classrooms about what they are learning.

Teachers and the principal talked about encouraging children to "be creative", "feel good about themselves", and strive for excellence. Achievements are acknowledged and rewarded, and "tall poppies" are celebrated. Children are encouraged to share examples of high-quality work with the principal, and achievements are recognised in assemblies.

Assessment and Evaluation

The school's rationale for assessment and analysis of student achievement is "To assess children by collecting and analysing information to establish their achievement level, learning needs and progress" (assessment policy). Assessment is conceptualised as a summative activity, which is intended to assist teachers "determine what has been learned, how well this achieves the aims and objectives of the teaching programme, and what the new aims and objectives will be" (assessment policy). A further reason for assessment is to assess school-wide learning trends, barriers to learning, and subsequent allocation of resources.

The school uses a computerised system, MUSAC (Massey University School Administration by Computer), to help with the recording and analysis of assessment data. An extensive amount of information is collected in reading, spelling, proofreading, mathematics, basic facts, and other curriculum areas. Results from standardised tests such as PATs are converted into percentages to allow comparison between results in term 1 and term 4. These are analysed by the principal. Where the data suggests that groups of children may have difficulties in specific areas, for example in understanding factual text, this is addressed in classroom programmes. This data is shared with the board of trustees, and used as evidence of the school's compliance with the Ministry's requirement to ". . . gather information that is sufficiently comprehensive to enable the progress and achievement of groups of students to be evaluated" (NAG 1, ii).

The school provided us with voluminous amounts of data, which has clearly involved staff in systematic summative assessment gathering. This material was summarised in a one-page achievement statement to the board of trustees, which reported average standards in reading, spelling, mathematics, and basics facts. The average reading ages across the school were approximately equivalent to average chronological ages.

Samples of children's work are also gathered regularly to determine what has been learned, how well this achieves the aims and objectives of the teaching programme, and what the new aims and objectives for subsequent teaching will be. Discussion of exemplars of children's written work across the school has allowed for the development of shared understandings of what achievement looks like at different levels.

Teachers also check on children's learning using a range of assessment tools, including School Entry Assessment, diagnostic survey, running records of reading to determine reading ages, conferencing, teacher observations, student self-evaluation, and anecdotal records. Individual folders are kept for each child so that progress can be tracked over time.

Regular discussions about everyday learning occur spontaneously as part of regular classroom interaction, and provide children with individual feedback to help them and their teachers to see what the next learning goals should be. While the formal data collection and reporting processes of the school emphasise assessment for summative purposes, actual practice appears to stress the importance of regular and purposeful monitoring and feedback with learners. The focus on aggregation of data from cohorts in the school documentation may reflect what the school itself expects to be assessed on during visits from ERO. One teacher described this as having to "prove that we are doing the right things" and there were other references to external accountability requirements. We found it interesting that the school's 2001 ERO report appeared to stress functions of assessment for reporting purposes, with no mention of the teachers' emphasis on productive, formative, teacher-learner interactions about student work.

The principal considers that parents want to know two main things from the school about their children's learning: "Are they up to speed?" and "Are they happy?" Reporting to parents about their children's progress is undertaken on a regular basis in a mixture of media, including interviews, and informal and formal written reporting. Individual folders show samples of work which can be discussed with parents. Parents are encouraged to drop in informally to discuss how their children are progressing.

The school report form describes student achievement in English, mathematics, and inquiry studies (science, social studies, and technology) as below, within, or above expected levels. All strands in English and mathematics achievement are reported on individually. Effort ratings are included for these curriculum areas. In addition, qualitative comments are included for these, for health and physical education, and for the arts curriculum areas. Personal development skills in 6 areas, e.g., "sets and evaluates own goals", "uses initiative", "works and plays co-operatively", are also rated.

The school has found it difficult to devise a reporting format that communicates clearly children's level of achievement without making the form unnecessarily complex and confusing. An attempt to show achievement bands on the report form was not successful. Parents commented that the revised report form was easier to understand, despite the fact that the term "expected level" has not been defined.

The principal considers that development of reporting formats has taken the school a tremendous amount of time, and that centralised models for reporting on student achievement would be welcomed by schools. In our view there is still a need for there to be better alignment across the system to support schools to take a parsimonious approach to data collection, and to have ready access to valid and manageable assessment tools for learning, teaching, and reporting.

Support for Teaching

Resources

This school appears to be exceptionally resource rich, with extensive centralised curriculum resources that are efficiently stored and accessible to all staff. The extra $130,000 that the school received from direct resourcing contributed to these developments.

The high-quality children's work in classrooms reflects the range of art materials, ICT tools, and wide curriculum resources that are available to support learning. Teachers do not need to supplement school resources from their own finances; one teacher commented, "There always seems to be money for things that are important." Money that is raised from syndicate productions is available to teachers to use on resources for their own areas.

Eight teachers interviewed spoke enthusiastically about improvements in ICT, and their belief that it has added "another dimension" to their teaching. The school has up-to-date hardware (including digital and video cameras, and editing equipment), access to the Internet, and software applications that support and enhance learning. It frequently hosts visitors from other schools to see how it uses ICT to support learning, teaching, school management, and administration.

Professional Expectations

Expectations for teachers to be enthusiastic, committed, and resourceful are also high. One teacher, although very positive overall about the school, said that "there is constant pressure to be as good as you can. It's always there. You compare yourself to others. We're always 'out there'. We have lots of visitors."

While expectations on teachers are high, teachers also mentioned that there is significant professional support available to them. "I know that I can ask anybody anything," said one teacher.

There is a well-developed system of in-class support or monitoring that is the responsibility of the team leaders. Once a term, a different area of the curriculum is checked, with unit plans assessed for adequacy of planning, as well as the translation of these into daily plans. A sample of children's work is followed to track how plans are reflected in student outcomes. Children's books are checked to see that feedback is regular and specific. The team leader formally observes a teaching session, and comments on classroom organisation and management. There are specific areas for observation, including the teacher's monitoring of learning during the lesson. The teacher receives a written report which includes commendations and recommendations. Following discussion, there may be an agreement about areas which require development. This process feeds into a self-reflection and appraisal process which occurs in term 4, when objectives are set for the following year.

The principal also formally observes each teacher teaching twice a year. Release time is provided for each teacher to discuss their teaching with the principal. Although one teacher admitted to initially finding this to be "petrifying", it is now an accepted part of the process for improving teaching. "He writes all the good things and makes some suggestions."

In our interviews, teachers did not specifically refer to this process as having assisted them to improve their teaching, although they did say that they appreciated the support role played by their team leaders, and considered that communication about teaching and learning had improved.

When prospective teachers are interviewed, the panel seeks to ascertain if a teacher will meet the school's professional expectations. One of the key attitudes that is looked for at interview is commitment to ensuring that all students do well. "If they say that in the interview, really espouse it, our job is to bring it out." (principal) A teacher told us that, until recently, the school tended to advertise positions as long-term relieving ones, so that it gave the school time to assess a teacher's suitability before making a permanent appointment. This policy has now changed, as the school has found that the calibre of applicant is higher when positions are seen to be permanent.

Professional Development

One feature of the professional development at this school is that much of it has been done "in-house". Much of the literacy and ICT development has been facilitated by a highly accomplished part-time teacher employed through the partnership with Sunshine Books. As in other schools, whole school development on critical aspects of literacy methodology, such as shared reading and shared writing, has been emphasised. Teachers have been taught strategies to help children to explore language, think critically, and process information, and they provide models that children can use when they read independently. They have learnt how to use targeted strategies to develop children's ability to predict, listen, and engage with text in productive ways. Teachers now revisit books to focus on different teaching points, and report that students never say "I've done that book before".

There has been concerted modelling of effective pedagogy both within teachers' own classrooms and in other rooms. Teachers have observed the modelling of effective literacy strategies with their classes at "easel time". The focus is for teaching to be skills-focused rather than activity-focused. In the lesson we observed with new entrant children, the teacher skillfully engaged the children in exploring initial letters, compound words, apostrophes, question marks, and descriptive words, as she modelled written language based on children's oral reports. This was followed by a short shared reading lesson, which began with teacher and children predicting the structure of the text, based on their previous knowledge of the author's work.

We were impressed with the many opportunities this teacher used to draw children's attention to features about text and to word analysis and meaning, in the context of an enjoyable literacy experience. While she demonstrated, she also explained what she was doing and why to the group of visiting educators. This "reflection in action" appeared to us to be a very effective professional development strategy.

Feedback on Teaching

Teachers as well as students are given targeted feedback. This occurs as part of ongoing professional development and the appraisal system. Teachers are observed during easel time by the teacher responsible for teacher development in the Sunshine contract, and suggestions about improvement are freely offered. A teacher in the middle syndicate said, "She said to have a break from guided reading. She gave me ideas, made me focus. She'll comment on the environment and on the children."

Another teacher said that this feedback convinced her that previously her teaching had been much more "shallow". Another teacher commented that the professional development and availability of in-class support has given her more knowledge about the possibilities in different texts, and the confidence to extend her teaching. Greater knowledge about how texts work has also improved the quality of feedback that teachers are able to provide on children's own writing.

The emphasis on literacy professional development in their own classrooms has resulted in changes in teaching practices. When teachers are able to observe exemplary teaching, and receive ongoing guidance and support to lift their own skills, there is a stronger likelihood that they will be successful in using these strategies productively.

Home-School Links

The school places emphasis on building constructive relationships with parents, so that both home and school can work together to enhance children's learning.

The two parents we interviewed told us that the home/school link was very strong in the junior syndicate. Parents are welcome at assemblies, and assist with trips, but the major emphasis appeared to be on strengthening the parents' roles as learning supports for their children, as opposed to helping within the school or fund-raising.

One parent spoke approvingly of the school's anti-bullying policy, and told us that she had personal experience of a situation where bullying was "dealt with quickly and well".

Others told us that when children from the school move on to intermediate school, they "are very prominent in extracurricular groups, multicultural groups, and sports teams". They attribute this to the interests and skills developed at primary school.

Teachers of junior children talked about training parents how to use books, "getting the children to think more, experience language more, retell what they read, not just reading the words".

Parents of new entrant children are required to purchase (at $4.50 a term) books that introduce 16 words in context each term. Parents are shown interesting ways that they can help their children to work with these words so that they are learnt. One teacher considered that this collaboration has made a significant difference to children's acquisition of basic vocabulary—"That's why we hardly have any reading problems."

The next focus of the school is to encourage more full parental involvement with parents of children in the middle and senior syndicates.

Teachers told us that some parents initially were resistant to the "no set homework" policy, as they had been used to supervising the completion of worksheets. The school considered that set homework worked against their goal of encouraging independence, but agreed to have worksheets available for parents who wanted them. "No-one's doing it now."

Students' Views of Their Experiences at School

One class of Year 6 students and a class of Year 4 students completed our questionnaire in class time, supervised by a researcher.

Year 6 Students

Table 19 shows the responses of 27 Year 6 students to 24 statements about their experience of school.

Students' responses highlighted the importance to them of friendship with their peers. Half of the children identified their friends as one of the things they liked best about school, with 25 considering that they "usually" had good friends.

Twenty-three indicated that they were "hardly ever" bullied, two said "sometimes" and two indicated "usually". These two students were students who appeared to have negative attitudes about school in general.

Most students (20) "usually" felt safe in the playground. This is similar to our results in other schools. Comments made included:

> It's a good place to be.
> I get treated write when I'm around my friends.
> I can be me.
> I feel happy.
> The children help you when you hurt.
> The children do not steal.

For the majority of children, school appears to be a safe and positive environment, where the rules are accepted as fair, and where they can enjoy themselves.

Relationships with teachers were regarded very positively. Most children said they liked their teachers, and felt that they were listened to by them. Ten students selected teachers as being one of the things they liked best about school, and 4 children mentioned that teachers made learning "fun". Two-thirds of the children said that their teacher "usually" told them when they did good work, and helped them to improve it. Most (20) considered that "usually" what they were learning in school would be needed for their future. A quarter of children's comments referred to curriculum and learning, with art accounting for one-third of the responses.

"Sports" were liked best by 11 students. While "learning" or "work" in general were identified by 9 students, there were just 2 references to mathematics, and one to "dance". No other specific curriculum areas were referred to, apart from one student who wrote "Do siance more and get lab stuff for it."

Other comments made by children indicated a sense that they felt supported and encouraged in their learning in this school:

> When I don't know what to do I always ask for help then friends and teachers will try to help me.
>
> I hardly ever feel like I have a problem.
>
> It helped me to read the first day I was here. (I moved to this school.)

Nine of the students considered that there was nothing they would wish to change. The most frequent suggestions related to improving playground facilities (7) and having more sports teams (4). "I think there should be more sports teams than the normal ones. Ones real girls would do like gymnastics."

For some children (3), there appeared to be an issue about policy with regard to bringing toys from home. Four children thought behaviour could be improved, and wanted their teachers to:

> Make everyone sencorbull.
> Make the boys more calm.
> Stop children from teasing each other.
> [Reduce] noise in class and in other classes and sometimes in assembly.

Year 4 Students

Table 20 shows the responses of 26 Year 4 students to the survey. For these children, the statements that received the highest levels of agreement were those which referred to their teacher. Most children (23) considered that "mostly" their teacher was kind to them, 22 said that "mostly" their teacher was fair to them, and 18 reported that the teacher "mostly" told them when they did good work. They were a little divided about how often they tried hard, with half admitting to trying hard only "sometimes". Nineteen thought that other children behaved well only sometimes, with 3 thinking that they hardly ever behaved.

The great majority "usually" felt that they belonged in the school (21), with two-thirds considering that they "usually" liked their school. Fifteen children usually felt safe in the playground, and 10 sometimes felt safe.

Friends were also mentioned frequently in reference to what was liked about school (17 comments), with teachers (10 comments) referred to next. Five children liked the playground best.

More of the younger children (17) identified aspects of the curriculum as what they enjoyed most. Five children referred to work, 4 to art, 3 to computers, 3 to maths, and 2 to English. In a school with high levels of achievement in literacy, it might have been expected that more children would have chosen reading or writing.

In response to the question about what they would like to change, 15 children either wrote "nothing" or left this section blank.

Three students suggested further playground development (pool, another adventure playground, obstacle course), and one had several suggestions to improve facilities: "liybery—big, offise—big, chers—soft, floor—carpit".

Three students indicated that they would like the standard of behaviour to improve:

> No more fighting.
> People were nice and kind and was never bad.
> The bad behavior and the bad people.

Given the comments made by both Year 4 and Year 6 students, it appears that some children see the behaviour of some of their peers as an issue.

Teachers' Views

Profile of Teachers Who Completed Surveys

Sex	Female	13
Position	Classroom teacher	9
	AD/DP	1
	Senior teacher	2
	Part-time teacher	1
Years of teaching experience	Less than 2	1
	2–4 years	4
	5–10 years	2
	11–20 years	5
	21 plus years	1
Years at Freedom Primary	Less than 2	4
	2–4 years	7
	5–10 years	2
	11–20 years	
	21 plus years	
Qualifications	Diploma of Teaching (5), Training Teachers Certificate (1), BEd (6), BA (2), BSc (1), Higher Dip (1)	
Membership of professional organisations	NZEI (5)	

Thirteen of the 16 teachers completed a questionnaire designed to help us to gain a greater understanding of school culture, and their views about teaching and learning, school development planning, and the ethos of the school. Their responses are shown in Table 21.

The statements to which teachers most strongly agreed were all related to the relationship between teachers and students. There was particularly strong agreement that staff encouraged students to do their best, and that teachers respect students. The majority of teachers also strongly agreed that they believed that all students could learn and be successful, that they encouraged them to be independent learners, and that student work was prominently displayed. All teachers considered that standards were challenging, and that they monitored the learning of individual students. These judgments support the views expressed in the interviews.

They all agreed that there was mutual respect between teachers and senior staff, and that the latter were available to discuss curriculum and teaching. However, teachers did not agree strongly that they usually turned to their colleagues for help when they had a problem with their teaching, and 5 were uncertain about the regularity of staff discussion about school goals and targets.

There was considerable ambivalence about whether staff meetings were worthwhile, and some uncertainty and disagreement about staff participation in important decision-making.

Teachers were also divided about the effectiveness of staff development time, and the majority did not consider that they had a voice in the selection of topics, or in the school strategic plan.

Teachers generally disagreed that they were able to regularly observe each other and give feedback on teaching, although there was comment later in the questionnaire that senior managers did this. It was suggested by one teacher that the opportunity to observe other teachers in action as part of staff development would be worthwhile. Two teachers suggested that closer team work could be developed between syndicate groups, as well as within them.

Teachers also completed a section in the questionnaire which asked them to rate changes in the school over the past 3–4 years. Results are shown in Table 22.

The statements to which teachers most strongly agreed were all related to the relationship between teachers and their students. Most of the teachers strongly agreed that they encouraged students to try their best (11), respected them (10), encouraged them to be independent learners (8), and believed that all students could be successful (8). All teachers also thought that standards were challenging and that they monitored the learning of individual students.

Three of the teachers indicated that they had been at the school less than 2 years, and 7 had served there between 2 and 4 years. There was a majority of responses in the "don't know" category when teachers were asked about changes. There were also quite a few responses in the "uncertain" category. Almost half of the teachers disagreed or were uncertain that children's behaviour had improved, and the same number did not consider that they had more contacts with other schools. More than half of the teachers considered that there had been positive changes in the way they taught, and that they monitored their progress more.

Teachers identified the school's involvement with the educational publisher and computer company as school strengths. Both were seen to have improved teacher and student knowledge. One teacher saw the partnership with the educational publisher as providing opportunities for teachers to demonstrate effective New Zealand literacy teaching to others.

Teachers wrote positively about the current strengths of the school. They saw that resources and work spaces had been developed and enhanced, thus making their jobs easier, and thought that the environment was stimulating.

Several teachers considered that there had been achievements in relation to children's learning:

> Pupils have become more independent readers and learners.
>
> They have more confidence and participate in a wide variety of activities.

They commented positively about the students as "positive, caring children", and thought that teachers shared a "desire to bring out the best in each child" as well as encouraging "the weaker children to shine". They also felt supported in their jobs by each other, and thought that there was a shared respect for each other and for their ideas. One teacher commented: "There is a focus on treating others well. 'Golden rule'—giving up time for others."

There was no clear pattern in teachers' suggestions for change, with the only comments made by more than one person referring to the wish to reduce class sizes (2), and for syndicate teams to work more closely together (2).

Support Staff

Six support staff completed surveys of their views of the school. Their responses are shown in Table 23.

Support staff had strongest agreement with statements to do with staff commitment to promoting and maintaining good community relations, and to belief and support of children's learning.

Their responses suggest that communication between themselves and teachers could be more effective, although they all enjoy their work in the school, and consider that their work is acknowledged by senior staff.

None of the support staff considered that staff meetings were spent on important issues.

Table 24 shows the support staff views of change in the last 3–4 years. Only 2 of the 6 staff had been at the school longer than 4 years, with 2 having less than 2 years' experience at the school. Most responses were in the "don't know" or "uncertain" categories, and there was little strong agreement with any items.

Areas where half or more of the support staff agreed that changes had occurred were related to school management and improvement in teaching.

They identified major achievements as being the school's positive ERO report, being a Sunshine school, and the improvements to buildings.

They considered the strengths of the school to be the stability of the teaching staff, the school's well-resourced and peaceful environment, and the friendly school atmosphere.

The only suggestion about desired changes referred to "consistent standards of learning and behavior across the school".

Summary

Freedom School has been strongly led by an outward looking and articulate principal. The principal and trustees have sought opportunities to enhance the school buildings and grounds, and improve resources available for teachers and students. Partnerships with two businesses have improved resources and provided substantial professional development. Both these partnerships appear to have significantly enhanced the quality of teaching and learning in the school, including the use of ICT.

The school climate appears to be largely positive, with attention devoted to interpersonal and affective dimensions as well as to achievement.

In line with other primary schools in New Zealand, the school has its focus firmly upon the teaching of literacy and numeracy. Teachers are relieved to be able to devote attention to concentrating on developing basic literacy and numeracy skills. Enhancing the capability of teachers in both areas is a priority, and teachers note that the literacy and numeracy strategies complement one another well.

Along with the majority of our case study schools, the school has participated in the Literacy Leadership project, although its involvement has not been extensive. The school does much of its literacy development "in house", employing a facilitator from Sunshine Books.

Although teachers were positive about the individualised and targeted help they received in relation to their literacy teaching, their responses to the questionnaire suggest that decisions about staff development could perhaps be more widely discussed.

Teacher workload appeared to be manageable. This may reflect the use of support staff, and the principal's view that part of his role is to free teachers from unnecessary administrative burdens to allow them more time to devote to teaching. Changes to school management and organisation have been considered and incremental, which also reduced demands made upon staff. The external environment is not overly demanding, and the school has not suffered any "crisis" in external review or perceptions.

Further challenges appear to be "not to become complacent", and to continue the journey towards improvement. As the principal noted, this journey is of necessity ongoing, and schools never arrive.

Table 19

Year 6 Students' Views of Their Experience at School (n=27)

School is a place where	Mostly	Sometimes	Never/hardly ever
I have good friends	25	2	0
I can learn what I need for the future	21	6	0
My teacher tells me when I do good work	20	6	1
The rules are fair	20	6	1
I feel safe in the playground	20	5	3
I enjoy myself	19	8	0
Teachers help me to improve my work	17	10	0
I do interesting things	17	10	0
Teachers treat me fairly	16	10	1
Teachers explain things clearly to me	15	12	0
I like my teachers	15	12	0
I could do better work if I tried	14	10	3
I keep out of trouble	14	12	1
Teachers listen to what I say	14	8	5
I learn most things pretty quickly	13	14	0
I get all the help I need	12	14	1
I get bored	5	11	11
Students behave well in my class	2	25	0
I feel restless	2	7	18
I get bullied	2	2	23
I get upset	1	9	17
I get a hard time	1	10	16
I get tired of trying	1	13	13
I feel lonely	0	7	20

Table 20

Year 4 Students' Views of Their Experience at School (n=26)

School is a place where	Mostly	Sometimes	Never/hardly ever	No response
My teacher is kind to me	23	3	0	
I belong in this school	22	3	1	
My teacher is fair to me	22	4	0	
My teacher tells me when I do good work	18	7	1	
I like my school	17	8	0	1
I feel safe in the playground	15	10	1	
I try hard at school	14	12	0	
I like my work	12	10	4	
My teacher helps me do better work	12	9	5	
Children in my class behave well	4	19	3	

Table 21

Teachers' Views of Their school (n=13)

The school now	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	No response
Staff encourage students to try their best	11	2			
Teachers respect students	10	3			
Teachers in this school believe that all students can learn	8	4			1
Student success is regularly celebrated in this school	9	3			1
Students' work is prominently displayed	8	3	1		1
Teachers in this school believe that all students can be successful	8	4	1		
Teachers encourage students to be independent learners	8	5			
Teachers regularly monitor the learning and progress of individual children	7	6			
The primary concern of everyone in the school is student learning	7	5	1		
New staff are well supported in this school	7	5	1		
Teachers regularly collaborate to plan their teaching	6	5	2		
Adults (teachers) as well as students learn in this school	6	6	1		
Senior staff are available to discuss curriculum/teaching matters	6	7			
Students are clear about standards of behaviour expected in the school	5	7			1
Staff in this school work hard to promote and maintain good relations with the community	5	6	2		
Non-teaching staff feel involved in the life of the school	5	6	2		
Students in this school are enthusiastic about learning	5	6	2		
Every attempt is made to set challenging standards of achievement for each student	4	9			
Teachers like working in the school	4	7	1	1	
Expectations about school work are communicated clearly to all students	4	9			
Teachers regularly discuss ways of improving students learning	4	7	2		
There is mutual respect between staff and senior staff in this school	4	9			
Staff feel encouraged to bring forward new ideas	4	7	2		
The Board of Trustees plays a significant role in supporting developments within the school	4	5	3		1
Standards set for students are consistently upheld across the school	4	8	1		
Students respect teachers	4	7	2		
Staff ensure that students receive constructive feedback about their work	3	9	1		
Staff have a commitment to the whole school and not just their class or syndicate	3	8	2		
Teachers pay attention to keeping the school environment attractive	3	8	2		
There is effective communication between senior staff and teachers	3	8	2		
Senior staff openly recognise teachers when they do things well	2	7	3		1
If staff have a problem with their teaching they usually turn to colleagues for help	2	10	1		
The staff encourage parents to be involved in the school	2	8	2		1
Disruption in classes is dealt with promptly so that learning for all students can proceed	2	8	2		1
At staff meetings time is spent on important things rather than on minor issues	2	9	2		
The school communicates clearly to parents the standard of work it expects from students.	2	8	3		
There is regular staff discussion about how to achieve school goals and targets	2	6	5		
Decision-making processes are fair	2	8	2		1
Teachers share similar beliefs and attitudes about effective teaching/learning	2	8	2		1
Parents are clear about behaviour standards expected in school	2	9	2		
The school development plan includes practical ways of	1	6	4	1	1

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The school now	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	No response
evaluating success in achieving goals and targets					
Whole school meetings are worthwhile	1	7	5		
Staff participate in important decision making	1	7	3	2	
The school allows staff joint planning time	1	9		1	2
The senior staff communicate a clear vision of where the school is going	1	9	3		
Extra curricular activities provide valuable opportunities for all students		7	4	1	1
Staff development time is used effectively in the school		6	5	1	1
Teachers have a say in topics selected for the school's staff development programme		5	7	1	
Teachers have a say in the school strategic plan		6	6	1	2
Non-teaching staff have input into the school strategic plan			8	3	2
There is effective communication among teachers		10	2	1	
Teachers regularly observe each other in the classroom and give each other feedback		1	4	8	
Students have some say in the school strategic plan			5	7	1

Table 22

Teachers' Views of Change Over Last 3–4 Years (n=13)

The school now	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	No response
We have made positive changes to the way we teach	3	5	1		4
We monitor our progress more	2	5	1		5
We enjoy our work more	2	3	2	1	5
We expect more of our students	1	3	2		7
We make more use of te reo Māori	1	2	4	2	4
We have made positive changes to the way the school runs		5	2	1	5
We have made positive changes to how we plan ahead		5	2		6
Parents show more interest in their children's learning		5	3		5
We have more professional development		2	4	2	5
We acknowledge children's cultures more		2	3	1	7
Student behaviour has improved		1	4	2	6
We have more contact with other schools		1	2	4	6

Table 23

Support Staff Views of Their School (n=6)

The school now	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	No response
Staff encourage students to try their very best	3	3			
Staff in this school work hard to promote and maintain good relations with the community	3	3			
The primary concern of everyone in the school is student learning	3	2			1
Students' work is prominently displayed	2	3			1
Senior staff openly recognise support staff when they do things well	2	4			
Standards set for students are consistently upheld across the school	2	2	1		1
Teachers respect students	1	5			
Students are clear about standards of behaviour expected in the school	1	4			1
Teachers in this school believe that all students can learn	1	3	1		1
Teachers believe that all children can be successful	1	4	1		
Staff have a commitment to the whole school and not just their class or syndicate	1	2	2		1
Student success is regularly celebrated in this school	1	4			1
Teachers in this school believe that all students can be successful	1	3	1		1
The Board of Trustees plays a significant role in supporting developments with the school	1	4			1
The senior staff communicate a clear vision of where the school is going	1	3	1		1
Support staff like working in this school	1	5			
Disruption in classes is dealt with promptly so that learning for all students can proceed	1	2	2		1
Whole school meetings are worthwhile	1	4			1
There is mutual respect between staff and senior staff in this school	1	5			
The school communicates clearly to parents the standard of work it expects from students	1	3	1		1
Students respect staff	1	5			
There is effective communication between teachers and support staff	1	3	2		
Parents are clear about behaviour standards expected in the school	1	1	3		1
Staff development time is used effectively in the school	1	2	2		1
Support staff feel involved in the life of the school	1	4	1		
New staff are well supported in this school	1	4	1		
Decision-making processes are fair		6			
The staff encourage parents to be involved in the school		5			1
There is effective communication among staff		5		1	
Adults as well as students learn in this school		4	2		
Support staff have input into the school strategic plan		4	1	1	
Students in this school are enthusiastic about learning		4	1		1
There is regular staff discussion about how to achieve school goals/targets		4	1		1
Staff feel encouraged to bring forward new ideas		4	2		
The school development plan includes practical ways of evaluating success in achieving goals and targets		4	1		1
Extra-curricular activities provide valuable opportunities for all students		3	1	1	1
Staff participate in important decision making		3	2		1
Staff pay attention to keeping the school environment attractive		1	4		1
At staff meetings time is spent on important things rather than on minor issues			5		1

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Table 24

Support Staff Views of Changes in the Last 3–4 Years (n=6)

Change over the last 3–4 years	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	No response
We have more professional development	1	2	1		2
We monitor our progress more	1	3			2
We expect more of our students	1		1	1	3
We have made positive changes to how we plan ahead	1	2	1		2
We have made positive changes to the way the school runs		3	1		2
We have made positive changes to the way we teach		3	1		2
We acknowledge children's cultures more		2	2		2
We enjoy our work more		2	2		2
We make more use of te reo Māori		1	3		2
Student behaviour has improved		1		2	3
Parents show more interest in their children's learning		1	2		3
We have more contact with other schools		1	2		3

5. ROLL-GROWTH SCHOOLS

Both the roll-growth schools substantially increased their rolls over a short time period by attracting new students and building up community perceptions of the worth of the school. One school was in an area of demographic change.

In managing the roll growth, both schools held fast to the goals of valuing diversity and meeting individual needs. One school structured itself as two campuses so that it could retain a country atmosphere. Both schools worked hard to be inclusive of all children and placed a strong emphasis on identification of students who needed special support in learning and behaviour.

The roll-growth schools had strong links with their communities and seemed to closely match the expectations and needs of the communities from which students were drawn.

WINDSOR SCHOOL

Introduction

Windsor School Profile

School type	Full primary, with a primary and intermediate campus
Roll size	325 Years 0–6; 251 Years 7–8; total 576
Decile rating	6
Locality	Inner city suburban
Student ethnicity	Pākehā – 51% Māori – 8% Indian – 10% Asian – 7% Tongan – 5% Samoan – 4% Other – 15%
Staffing entitlement	26.10
Actual staffing	27
Recommended	By a principal from the same cluster as an "improving school that has a good local reputation in the local area. The school has a committed passionate principal, who loves to learn and has built the roll."

Windsor School is located in an inner city suburb. Although officially classified by the Ministry of Education as a full primary school, it is run as a campus consisting of a primary and an intermediate school. The intermediate school has been on site for over 50 years. Five years ago a new primary school was built because of a shortage of primary schools in the area.

Windsor Primary School has 149 of its 325 Year 0–6 students in Years 0–2, an indication of the growing attractiveness of the school to local parents. There are 11 teachers in this part of the school.

Windsor Intermediate School has 251 students. Nine teachers teach Year 7 classes and 4 teach Year 8 classes. The intermediate students are distinguished from the rest of the school by the wearing of a school uniform.

Each school has a deputy principal who is released from full-time classroom teaching, but who, like the principal, teaches on a regular basis. This includes reading recovery, and literacy and mathematics teaching to reduce class sizes. A senior teacher is released for a day a week to act as the director of professional development. This allows the senior management team to help and support teachers to improve their teaching.

There are separate enrolment zones for the primary and the intermediate schools, with the intermediate drawing from a wider and more diverse community. There are children from 26 cultural groups in the school. While both schools are culturally diverse, 46 percent of the intermediate students are Pākehā compared with 68 percent of the primary students. While Māori and Asian enrolments are similar in the two schools, significantly more Pasifika and Indian students attend the intermediate school. Overall the school is classified as decile 6, although the principal believes that as part of the primary zone overlaps that of a decile 10 school, there is a significant group of primary students who are from economically advantaged homes.

A technology centre providing technology instruction (clothing, home economics, metalcraft, and woodcraft) is also part of the intermediate school. Each week, about 684 students from other schools are taught by the centre's 4.4 staff.

The board of trustees employs one full-time office ancillary assistant, 5 part-time teacher aides, a part-time administration manager, 2 part-time cleaners, and a full-time caretaker and groundsperson.

The school also has a double satellite unit with 13 students from a special school, and 2 staff.

There is a school dental clinic on site, and an after-school care programme run independently of the school.

The school has attractive classrooms, and well-maintained and extensive grounds. There is a 22-metre swimming pool. New classroom blocks have been added without detracting significantly from space available to students for playing.

A welcoming sign in 11 community languages is prominently displayed at the entrance. In the school hall is a large banner proclaiming *Windsor School celebrates cultural diversity.*

This school was selected on the recommendation of another principal from the same cluster as an "improving school that had a good local reputation in the local area. The school had a committed passionate principal, who loved to learn and had built the roll." The decision to include the school was also supported by the most recent ERO report of the school, and by staff from the local college of education.

The community has high academic expectations and the school seeks to meet these, both by the quality of classroom programmes, and by providing additional learning opportunities and experiences. The school prospectus highlights that the school offers "rigorous" academic programmes, a strong emphasis on literacy and numeracy in Years 1–3, extension classes for gifted and talented students, and Australian Testing in English, science, and maths from Years 4–8. It also details how ICT is integral to classroom programmes, and explains that attention is given to critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as well as to the development of emotional intelligence and personal skills. The availability of additional help in literacy and numeracy and of programmes for children with special learning needs is noted. The prospectus also states that excellence is rewarded, and refers to the Windsor Cup, which is awarded to the most outstanding student in Year 8 for all-round attainment.

The school offers an options programme for the intermediate students that includes Japanese, French, architectural design, money (banking and shares), journalism, drama, books club, te reo Māori, and future problem solving. These classes are taught weekly by teachers from both schools.

The school donation is $95 per child for Years 1–6 and $45 for Years 7–8, plus an additional $100 fee for information technology, technology materials, and Internet use. Despite this being a school with higher than average fund-raising capacity, the principal said that the school was constantly hampered by a lack of funding. He pointed out that there is continual pressure on schools to improve and to change, but that "you can't do it on a shoe string. Sustainable change needs ongoing resourcing."

The previous board of trustees raised the possibility of accepting the financial incentives available under bulk funding of teachers' salaries as a means to improve the financial position of the school, but this was opposed and did not occur. When the offer was enhanced, this issue was raised again. Community meetings were held, and despite one parent being a well-known public opponent to bulk funding, it was seen to be in the best interests of the school to proceed. The board chair said that he had personal sympathy for the views of parents who opposed bulk funding: "I agreed with the argument, but our job wasn't to decide whether it was morally right or wrong, but how it would benefit our school."

The school went into the scheme knowing that it was likely to be for a limited time. In the 18 months that the school was in the scheme, it gained $100,000 additional funding. This money has been invested, and the interest it generates has provided the school with 4 additional computers each year. The principal said, "One of the problems with schools is that they are constantly hand-to-mouth. That money in the bank gave us confidence to make decisions." This confidence resulted in the establishment of the computer lab, although it was funded mainly through the operations grant.

School staff felt that the continuing viability of the school depended to some extent on the attractiveness of the environment, and on the provision of state of the art amenities such as ICT. One teacher acknowledged "We need to look good to keep the children. It's not the driving force though. I've been in some schools where it is." It is, however, as the principal noted, a constant effort to resource the school to the levels which are needed to meet community and government expectations.

In this school we interviewed the principal, the deputy principal, the board chair, 3 classroom teachers, the literacy and science curriculum leaders, the school secretary, a teacher aide, and a group of parents.

The most significant changes in the last 3–4 years have been the appointment of a new principal, and the expansion of the primary school from 6 to 13 classrooms.

All of those interviewed described managing the roll growth as the school's biggest challenge in recent years. Negotiation with the Ministry of Education has been ongoing and at times frustrating, for while the Ministry will continue to staff the school as the roll grows, it may not be prepared to continue to build classrooms while there are classrooms empty in other local schools. The Ministry has suggested that the school reduces the size of its zone. However, higher numbers result in higher operational funding, and while parents were sympathetic to schools experiencing roll decline, they did not believe that the Ministry should "interfere with our zone": "We should be allowed to grow. Don't knock us back just because other schools aren't growing."

There is somewhat of an irony in this, as the school itself experienced a falling roll until the new primary school opened 5 years ago, after which the roll started growing.

Roll growth has required continual recruitment of new teachers, each bringing new perspectives and different expertise. This has resulted in the school being in constant change, requiring continual changes in structures, procedures, and teaching. The principal was appointed in 1998 from the position of deputy principal. During the past 3 years, the board has appointed new senior staff, all external appointments.

The 2000 ERO report on the school commented on the growth of the school roll, and noted that, "The principal and the board have skilfully managed this growth and the associated developments." Until school zoning was reintroduced, the primary school attracted families from out of zone because of its comparatively small size, in relation to other large schools in the area, and its responsiveness to student needs.

Staff and parents described the school as "a city school with a country school atmosphere" and a "family school". Real estate advertising now highlights the fact that houses for sale are within Windsor School zone. By October 2001, when NZCER visited, there had been 276 new enrolments that year at the school.

The appointment of the new principal is viewed positively by staff and parents. The previous principal had done much to enhance the reputation of the school, and the current principal recalled that his predecessor brought "child centredness, a love of learning and a love of children to the school". Staff acknowledged that her leadership made a significant difference to the school climate, to expectations for children's learning, and to organisational systems (e.g., policy development) within the school.

The school seemed to have maximised opportunities resulting from demographic changes in its area. Council policies encouraging high-density housing, and the growing attractiveness of the area to young professional families, have allowed the school to grow and develop in creative and enterprising ways. The strong roll growth reflects both the demographic situation, and the community perception that this is a school that is attractive and responsive to parents.

The features that stand out in this school as contributing to its improvement are:

- school–community relationships;
- school relationships and values;
- focus on student behaviour;
- curriculum and assessment;
- a learning orientation.

School–Community Relationships

At the core of the school–community relationship is mutual respect and valuing of the contributions each makes to children's learning. Teachers spoke warmly of the support provided by parents, who in turn were appreciative of the commitment of staff. One young primary teacher identified parents as a key source of professional support.

> Parents – I love working with them. They really care about the school. They really care about you as a teacher. Most are very realistic. They realise that we have a hard job. We have their unwavering support. They really back you. They don't undermine you.

However, a teacher from the intermediate school saw the role of parents differently. This could reflect the fact that by the time their children are at intermediate school, parents are more likely to be involved in the paid work force.

> In the primary school the parents are in and out a lot. Our expectations match. In the intermediate school, if you don't have complaints, then they are happy. (teacher)

Teachers in the intermediate school endeavour to keep lines of communication open by a homework notebook system, whereby teachers and parents can communicate about school work. Parents sign the notebook each week to indicate that they have read it. Teachers and parents find that this system enables any issues to be identified and addressed early, before they become real problems.

Parents described the staff as all being very approachable, and as people who welcomed their involvement and help. The school's open door policy extends to the classrooms, and while this is usually positive, it can create pressure on teachers, particularly new ones. A senior teacher described how parents of the younger children tend to arrive early, at 2.30 pm, and come into the classrooms to see how their children are getting on.

Teachers are very conscious that children get only one chance at school, and they feel a moral accountability to them and to their families to ensure that this chance is as good as it can be. The principal stressed:

> We listen to parents and to their needs and concerns. You're taking someone's baby for six hours of the day so you have to treat them carefully.

And a teacher reiterated, "You're dealing with people's most precious thing."

The school holds parent forums from time to time, to talk with parents about curriculum and teaching methods. The dates and times of these are sent home in weekly newsletters, so that parents can put items for discussion on the agenda.

The principal actively promotes the school to future parents by visiting 10 local early childhood centres with the primary deputy principal. When parents are considering enrolling their child, the principal will take the time to talk about the school values and philosophy, and show the parents around the school. Teachers told us that it is usual for the enrolment process to take up to an hour, to allow time for the school and parents to share information and to learn from each other.

The 2000 ERO report commented that "the board, principal and staff are culturally inclusive and responsive to parents' opinions and views". All teachers strongly agreed with the statement "Staff in this school work hard to promote and maintain good relations with the community" in our survey.

The principal has a principal's "Late Night" at school one night a week till 7.00 pm for parents who find it difficult to come to school during the day. Some teachers also have regular late nights when parents know they will be available.

Another initiative, Parents in Schools, has been set up by parents to encourage other parents to become involved in the daily life of the school. Parents are surveyed by questionnaire to pinpoint talents, time available, and capabilities, providing a valuable database. The group meets monthly to discuss organisational issues, and parents are also rostered to work with teachers or to do "behind the scenes" tasks if preferred.

Parents of children in the primary area of the school are generous with their time, both for help within the classrooms as parent tutors, and as fund-raisers. They pointed out that while raising funds enabled the school to do more, they also saw this as a tangible way of demonstrating to teachers that they were valued.

Fund-raising was also seen as important by parents because it strengthened community relationships. Some fund-raisers are not intended to make money, but to provide an opportunity for the community to get together. In 2000, a core group of parents were able to raise $23,000. This school benefits from parents who have the resources and expertise to offer it.

The board of trustees is supportive, and it was clear from the interviews that the board and the school staff respect and value one another and work well as a team. The board chair considers that because of the mutual trust and respect, they have "a staff that thinks like a staff, and a school that thinks like a school. Not us and them."

The board is quite clear that its role is that of governance, which the chair defines at one level as complying with government determined financial, property, and reporting standards. The chair identified the management of learning and curriculum as the responsibility of the principal, saying, "We have very little input in terms of classrooms. That's the teacher's responsibility. We get reports from the teacher representative and the principal as they see fit. It is our role to question 'why is this happening etc?' We rely on reports from the school."

The board accepts that it has a responsibility to have broad oversight of the quality of education provided by the school. While it does not believe that it should have day-to-day input in terms of classroom practice, it looks for evidence that children are learning. The school provides data-based information to the board on school achievement. "We rely on reports from the school, things like '80 percent of kids are reading above their chronological age'; we can understand that."

The board chair acknowledges the responsibility of the board to understand the information it receives, and will ask the principal or teachers to explain the reasons for school decisions. Because the board members are frequently in the school, they get many opportunities to directly observe how the school is managed, and they have trust and confidence in the principal and the teachers.

> We are very involved in the school. The board is not just a bunch of lawyers and accountants who sit around in suits and ties. We're just a group of interested parents with the interests of the kids at heart. The board members are in touch with what is going on, so we would be aware of any anomalies. (chair)

Relationships and Values

The school prospectus lists Windsor values as excellence, diversity, honesty, and communication. Affective values are as important as academic values in this school. Additional values, such as informality, friendliness, approachability, availability, enjoyment, and support, were frequently mentioned in interviews as characteristic of the climate of the school.

Most staff, including the principal, are addressed by their first names. The warmth with which she was treated as a student teacher drew one teacher to apply for a position in the school.

> I felt welcomed and I knew that I would get a lot of support. It's not often when you are a student that you can go to another teacher [i.e., not the designated associate teacher] and they'll take half an hour out of their time to help you.

Staff particularly value the encouragement, recognition, and support that they get from each other. They see each other as united in their purpose, and they are secure in the knowledge that support is readily available when needed. "We are a community. We want everybody to be successful. We wouldn't want to let anyone down." (teacher) There was strong agreement (10 out of 13 responses) to the questionnaire statement that "senior staff are available to discuss curriculum and teaching matters". Teachers talked about wanting each other to succeed, and enjoying each other's successes.

Several staff talked about the flexibility that they were allowed, viewing their workplace as a high trust environment. Expectations tended to be reinforced by standards established by staff, rather than by external accountability.

The importance of honesty in relationships was raised frequently. The school prospectus states, "This partnership with parents relies on our being honest when reporting on student progress." Several teachers agreed that being honest with each other, with parents, and with children was emphasised. "If a child's not reading well we're not afraid to say so. We get together to work on it together. Not to blame, to tell it like it is." Teachers were, however, sensitive to the impact on children's self esteem and on parents when lack of achievement was reported: "It must be demeaning for the kids to always see on their report forms that they are achieving below where they are expected to achieve." In cases where achievement is below national expectations, teachers and caregivers mutually explore options for improvement.

Several teachers used the example of the school's response to the 11 September terrorist incidents in the USA as an example of its honest approach to the children. Because of the timing of the tragedy, teachers noticed that some children were confused and upset, others had misinformation, and others were afraid that they were in imminent danger. The school held a short special assembly where the facts were shared, and where the principal focused on caring for others, particularly for family. "We didn't want to sensationalise it, but neither did we want to pretend that it didn't happen." (teacher)

Behaviour

The school has high expectations for student behaviour, which are expressed in terms of 3 basic rights: everyone in the school has the right to learn, to safety, and to respect.

Teachers believe that schools should teach people to "be great little citizens, getting along with others, including others, having values". The school monitors children's perceptions of bullying, and reports that there has been a significant increase in the number of children who feel safe in the school.

All members of the school community are expected to show respect to others by being polite and courteous. The focus is on recognition and reinforcement of desirable behaviour, in affirming and light-hearted ways.

Behavioural expectations appear to have been internalised, and are reflected in comments by children such as "That's not the Windsor way." Yet only 8 of 29 Year 3 and 4 children considered that their classmates usually behave well.

A behaviour plan is in place for older students who do not respond to preventative approaches. This plan has 5 steps, which progress from a warning to time out, detention, withdrawal, and stand-down. This plan, which is well known to students and families, is built on the 3 school rights, and the intention is to help students both to make positive choices about their behaviour, and to develop the strategies which promote these choices. Teachers have been influenced by approaches such as those of Glasser and Bill Rogers. As one teacher explained, "We kind of talk the same talk like 'Tell me what you've chosen. Are you going to sit quietly and do this or do you need to sit by yourself?'."

Curriculum and Assessment

Teachers were articulate in their beliefs about the purposes of education and what children should learn in school. They were adamant that education should involve more than the attainment of narrowly defined goals, and that schools should foster a lifelong passion for learning.

The commonly expressed view of learning was that successful learning is built on a solid foundation of basic skills, which permits the development of creativity, resourcefulness, and intellectual risk taking. There was a view that educated individuals would be open-minded but critical. "No one can say WHAT they need to know, but they need to be able to interpret information and think critically. They also need social decision making skills." (teacher)

Teachers are encouraged to know and value their students as individuals, so that students are known and understood, and can be given encouragement and targeted feedback to improve their learning. The recently introduced system of cross grouping in Years 7 and 8 for English and mathematics, as well as some specialist teaching, has not been supported by all teachers, as they believe that this hampers their overall knowledge and understanding of student needs, as well as opportunities for curriculum integration. Data of achievement in science, however, has convinced the principal and the board that achievement levels have been raised. We felt that some teachers were not persuaded by this data.

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This school came to grips with the new curriculum documents as they were introduced, and attempted to assess large numbers of learning outcomes in each curriculum. One teacher said that they had "got into the habit" of trying to comply with every demand, which resulted in the manufacture of volumes of data which served no purpose other than compliance. Now that there is greater knowledge of good assessment practice, teachers feel more confident about working out, "Well, what do we need to know?"

The new NAGs have permitted the school to streamline its approach to curriculum. One junior school teacher said, "We can now work out what we need to do with Windsor children. Our kind of kids. We are not trying to do everything, but are going back to the basics with our literacy review and an emphasis on the number strand in maths."

Teachers at all levels emphasised that the appointment of new senior staff facilitated the development of school-wide approaches to planning and assessment. To a certain extent, teacher autonomy in relation to curriculum has been reduced, but most teachers considered that there is now more certainty that children will have access to a coherent progression of learning experiences. The school-wide frameworks for planning are intended to make planning more focused and to provide a supportive structure for teachers. Collaborative planning is a feature of this school, and beginning teachers receive extensive guidance in this area from their tutor teachers.

The school has developed organisational structures to provide leadership in key curriculum areas. It participated in the Ministry of Education's Literacy Leadership Professional Development contract, resulting in the development of a school literacy vision and clear strategies for its achievement. It now has a literacy lead group which consists of the teacher with overall responsibility for literacy, and a teacher from each area of the school. This group facilitated a review of literacy within the school in 2001, using an advisor from School Support Services as a consultant. As part of this review, the school examined its current practices in teaching reading and written language, and decided that its first priority was teaching of written language. Samples of written language were collected from across the school, and the teachers sorted these into levels. This work became the focus for discussion about expectations, achievement standards, and benchmarks, and identified gaps and overlaps in the teaching of writing. At the same time, some teachers attended a course on monitoring of written language which required them to bring samples of writing from their class. One teacher was gratified to find that the samples from her class were assessed as being at a higher level than those in other schools. The literacy lead group has developed a framework for the teaching of writing at each level. This will now be followed up with further professional development for all teachers.

Teachers are becoming more skilled in collecting classroom information that allows them to pinpoint student learning needs and to develop teaching practices. They make use of resources such as the Assessment Resource Banks. Assessment indicates that students are achieving at comparatively high levels.

All students have an assessment portfolio which contains examples of their assessed work, showing curriculum level, achievement objectives, and specific learning outcomes, as well as showing whether the work meets or is below or above expectations. These are shared with students and parents.

There are some mixed feelings about the value and meaning of the portfolios. There is the potential for the portfolios to create unnecessary work and pressure, without adding to authentic knowledge of children's progress. On the other hand, some teachers have found that portfolios enable them to have a very clear picture of where each child is achieving. "I can look over the lot and see patterns, see groups that need, say, extra in punctuation, and I can go with this."

The parents interviewed also questioned the value of the portfolios, indicating that they considered they took up a lot of teacher time. When they were first introduced, portfolios were sent home each term, although that has now been reduced to twice a year. One parent felt that the portfolios did not help her understand her child's progress, and that the school reports provided a more honest picture. "When they talk about 'Meets the objective', is that the objective for the class or is that a personal thing? Is that a good result for the child?" Another parent admitted to being "a bit foggy" about interpreting the bar graphs that are intended to show achievement. However, one of the parents saw the portfolio as a good tool around which to focus discussion about learning and improvement with her own child.

Portfolios appear to be beginning to contribute to teacher overview of individual and class needs, as well as assisting some parents to talk with teachers and their own children about progress. As one teacher said, it is still very much a "work in progress", as teachers work towards making the process manageable and meaningful, and understandable to parents.

Teachers report in writing to parents twice a year. The school reports specify both attainment levels (B = below expectations, M = met expectations, A = above expectations) and effort ratings for all curriculum areas. The report also shows student progress in personal and social development. The school is looking forward to the development of national exemplars to improve the validity of their judgments.

Professional Learning

The school invests significantly in professional development for all staff, as it believes that teacher knowledge is the most important variable in improving its performance. In recent years staff development in relation to the new curriculum documents has been a priority. The worth of these Ministry contracts was largely dependent on the skills of the facilitators. On occasions facilitators failed to engage the interest and commitment of staff, indicating that selection and availability of skilled facilitators is vitally important.

Professional development needs are also identified by school-wide data collection and as part of the appraisal system. While most of the resources are now targeted to school-wide learning, funding is also allocated for individual courses when this is deemed to be worthwhile. In our survey, 5 teachers were ambivalent about the effective use of staff development time.

Increasingly, internal staff development, which harnesses the strengths within the staff, is encouraged. There is provision for the literacy team to be released to provide time for this to be done within the school day.

As in other schools, teachers disagreed with the statement in the questionnaire that "Teachers regularly observe each other in the classroom and give each other feedback". The school day is not currently organised to provide time for teachers to observe and critique one another's teaching.

Students' Views of their Experiences at School

Most of the 28 Year 8 students surveyed had good friends and hardly ever felt lonely at school.

Although many students enjoyed school, felt safe in the playground, and liked their teachers, over a third stated this applied only sometimes. Half the students sometimes got upset at school. These items are about feelings of wellbeing and enjoyment.

Half or more of the students were equivocal about a range of items related to their own learning, support from teachers for learning, and their own and other students' behaviour. They thought the following occurred only sometimes:

Own learning:
- *I do interesting things.*
- *I learn most things pretty quickly.*
- *I can learn what I need for the future.*

A majority also thought they sometimes or always got bored.

Support for learning:
- *Teachers explain things to me clearly.*
- *My teacher tells me when I do good work.*
- *I get all the help I need.*

Behaviour:
- *I keep out of trouble.*
- *Students behave well in my class.*

About half the students thought they got a hard time either sometimes or mostly, and 12 thought they sometimes or mostly got bullied.

The things that Year 8 students liked best about the school were sports, the people, and the school facilities (playground, computers, and library). Seven students identified teachers (usually qualified as "some" or "most") as being the things they liked best about the school. Six students specifically identified technology as what they liked best. Other comments valued the small size of the intermediate, and the fact that this meant they were known. This was shown by comments such as:

> It's small so the teachers know us better.
> Talents are noticed.
> We know our principal and our principal knows us.

Nineteen Year 8 students offered suggestions as to how the school could be changed. The fact that 5 students thought that speeches should be dropped reflected the current curriculum focus. The same number felt that there were too many independent research projects.

Other than the 4 suggestions to extend lunch and recess times, most suggestions were made by individual students. Three students, however, referred to the lack of teachers other than Pākehā. One of these students said the school needed "more multiculture teachers not just white".

Most Years 3 and 4 students felt they belonged in the school, tried hard, and thought their teacher was fair most of the time.

Most thought that children in their class behaved well only sometimes, but no one thought that they hardly ever behaved well.

The things Years 3 and 4 students liked best about school were largely related to learning. One student wrote, "Learning new stuff espeucaly Maths or mathetamatic and spelling."

A total of 68 references were made to enjoyment of the curriculum, with 30 referring to aspects of literacy, including reading, oral language, SSR (sustained silent reading), spelling, and writing. The subject next most enjoyed was physical education (16 references), followed by mathematics.

Fifteen children identified their friends as the aspect of school they liked best, and 8 mentioned their teacher.

Very few children identified any changes they would like to make, with the most common response to this item being to leave it blank or to write a comment along the lines of, "Nothing because it's cool anyway."

Three children suggested increasing the lunch and interval breaks. Isolated comments made by individual children included:

> Make the shelter a little bigger.
> No shouting or screaming.
> More money so we can be rich.
> Have miris in girls toilit.

Teachers' Views

Profile of Teachers Who Completed Surveys

Sex	Female	9
	Male	4
Position	Classroom teacher	8
	Senior teacher	2
	AD/DP	1
	Specialist teacher	1
	Other	1
Years of teaching experience	Less than 2	3
	2–4 years	2
	5–10 years	3
	11–20 years	2
	21 plus years	3
Years at Windsor School	Less than 2	8
	2–4 years	
	5–10 years	4
	11–20 years	
	21 plus years	1
Qualifications	Diploma of Teaching (10), BA (5), BEd (3), Secondary Teacher Certificate, Automative Engineer, ASTC, B Ind Sc, Dip Bus, Certificate of Proficiency Māori, BSW, Trained Teacher Certificate, ESOL Certificate, Certificate of Adult Teaching	
Membership of professional organisations	NZEI (7), Rugby club (and liaison person), PPTA, ATTA, AD/DP group	

The items where there was no uncertainty or disagreement amongst teachers were about teachers' focus and support for student learning, collegiality between staff in areas such as availability of staff to discuss curriculum and teaching, support and respect for each other, good community relationships and involvement of parents, and enjoyment.

On the whole, teachers believe that behavioural standards are communicated clearly to students and to parents, but there was not strong agreement that standards were consistently upheld across the school, and some ambivalence that students were clear about expected standards of behaviour.

Teachers were uncertain or disagreed that they regularly observe each other in the classroom and give each other feedback. Over half were uncertain or disagreed that students have a say in the strategic plan.

All 8 teachers who responded to questions about change over the last 3–4 years thought the school had made positive changes to the way the school taught, the way the school ran, and how the school planned ahead. Teachers' written comments indicated that they saw improvements in curriculum planning and assessment, and the streamlining of administrative requirements. Identified school strengths related to collegiality and to school culture.

These teachers were largely uncertain about or did not respond to the following items:

- We have more professional development.
- We have more contact with other schools.
- Parents show more interest in their children's learning.

These items are about linkages with others and professional support.

Support Staff Views

Profile of Support Staff Who Completed Surveys

Sex	Female	3
Position	Teacher aide	1
	Deputy librarian	1
	Office manager	
	Office assistant	1
	Caretaker/cleaner	
Years at Windsor School	Less than 2	3
	2–4 years	
	5–10 years	
	11–20 years	
	21 plus years	

Because only 3 support staff completed the survey, we have not reported their responses in a table. All strongly agreed that staff work hard at community relations, and that they felt involved in the life of the school. None were able to comment on changes, as they had all been recently employed.

Challenges for the Future

All participants were asked what they thought the next challenges were for the school. Managing the roll growth constructively was the strongest theme that emerged from these responses. The school anticipates that the by-laws which allow continuing construction of high density housing will continue to create pressure to reduce the zone. While there is some support for this, there is concern about the ongoing need for facilities to teach the increasing numbers of 5-year-old new entrants. This year the school enrolled 70 new entrants, and it is likely that numbers will have to be reduced to avoid congestion as they progress through the school.

It is also likely that the decile level of the school will rise as the intermediate zone is reduced to cater for the increasing numbers of primary school students as they reach intermediate. The school will become less multicultural, and this is regretted by some teachers, particularly those who have taught and enjoyed the cultural mix of intermediate classes.

Summary

Windsor School has changed dramatically in recent years, from a small intermediate school that was not the school of choice for many families in the area to a large and growing campus. Despite the school's official status as a full primary school, the board has seen the market potential of offering a separate primary and an intermediate school. The double satellite unit from a special school is also seen as an asset by the school and its community.

Rapid demographic changes mean that the school faces challenges in retaining the community desired aspects of a "small school", while maximising the financial benefits that managed roll growth will bring. Incentives to compete with other schools for students remain, and awareness of the necessity to present a good image is at the forefront of the school's approach to community relations.

The school has nurtured and encouraged highly positive relationships with its community, and there appears to be a strong and mutually supportive parent–school partnership.

Providing the kind of education that attracts an increasingly affluent community while meeting the needs of diverse learners is a particular challenge for this school, which it appears to be meeting well. The school places strong emphasis on offering an environment where its students develop the critical facilities and interpersonal skills and qualities to be active citizens.

With increasing urbanisation and the lack of easy access to public spaces available for play, it is important to have well-equipped, well-supervised, and attractive playground environments.

The school has a broad conception of learning. Teachers are attempting to lift their sights beyond coverage of curriculum objectives to the design of learning experiences which encourage greater depth and exploration of areas of study. Learning is central in this school, and children's responsiveness to this is evident in the quality of their work and their enjoyment in learning. This is particularly noticeable in the junior area of the school.

Teachers have developed a greater appreciation of the usefulness of monitoring and assessment of student learning. They have begun to see the value in collectively examining students' work to direct their planning, and to provide feedback about the effectiveness of their teaching. In common with many other schools, teachers are looking forward to new tools which will allow them to have greater confidence in the way they look at, evaluate, assess, and support learning and student progress.

Teachers in this school benefit from the collaborative working environment it offers them. Intermediate teachers' practice has benefited from working with new teachers in the primary sections. School-wide frameworks for planning and assessment are being developed to strengthen the quality and coherence of student learning experiences.

Teachers stressed the importance of continuing professional learning in an environment that is always in a state of change. Ongoing professional development is needed to keep teachers up-to-date with new curriculum requirements, and ways of looking at teaching and assessment. Professional development strategies that appear to have had the strongest impact on teaching have engaged teachers in concrete tasks, such as examining products of student learning, e.g., writing samples, and those which are collaborative, allowing for sharing of educational knowledge. The experience and skills of external facilitators were critical factors in the success of professional development.

Table 25

Year 8 Students' Views of Their Experience at School (n=28)

School is a place where	Mostly	Sometimes	Never/hardly ever	No response
I have good friends	22	6		
I feel safe in the playground	18	9	1	
I enjoy myself	16	11	1	
I like my teachers	16	9	3	
Teachers help me to improve my work	15	12	1	
I could do better work if I tried	14	13	1	
The rules are fair	14	13	1	
Teachers treat me fairly	12	12	4	
I do interesting things	12	15	1	
Teachers listen to what I say	12	11	5	
I keep out of trouble	11	14	3	
Teachers explain things clearly to me	10	16	2	
My teacher tells me when I do good work	9	16	3	
I get all the help I need	8	15	5	
I learn most things pretty quickly	6	20	2	
I get tired of trying	6	12	10	
I feel restless	6	13	9	
I can learn what I need for the future	5	18	5	
I get a hard time	4	10	13	1
I get bored	4	17	7	
Students behave well in my class	3	19	6	
I get bullied	3	9	16	
I get upset	1	14	13	
I feel lonely		7	21	

Table 26

Years 3 and 4 Students' Views of Their Experience at School (n=29)

School is a place where	Mostly	Sometimes	Never/hardly ever	No response
I belong in this school	27	1	1	
I try hard at school	24	5		
My teacher is fair to me	23	5		1
I like my school	21	8		
My teacher tells me when I do good work	20	8	1	
I feel safe in the playground	20	8		1
My teacher is kind to me	18	10		1
I like my work	17	10	1	1
My teacher helps me do better work	16	11		2
Children in my class behave well	8	21		

Table 27

Teachers' Views of Their School (n=14)

The school now	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	No response
Staff in this school work hard to promote and maintain good relations with the community	14				
Senior staff are available to discuss curriculum/teaching matters	11	3			
Staff encourage students to try their best	10	4			
Teachers respect students	10	4			
Teachers regularly monitor the learning and progress of individual children	9	5			
The primary concern of everyone in the school is student learning	9	5			
The staff encourage parents to be involved in the school	9	5			
Teachers encourage students to be independent learners	9	5			
Teachers believe that all children can be successful	8	6			
New staff are well supported in this school	8	4	2		
There is mutual respect between staff and senior staff in this school	8	5	1		
The board of trustees plays a significant role in supporting developments within the school	4	7	2		1
Teachers have a say in the school strategic plan	8	4	2		
Senior staff openly recognise teachers when they do things well	8	5	1		
Student success is regularly celebrated in this school	8	5	1		
Teachers like working in the school	7	7			
Students' work is prominently displayed	7	4	3		
Teachers in this school believe that all students can be successful	7	5	1		1
Teachers in this school believe that all students can learn	6	8			
Students are clear about standards of behaviour expected in the school	7	3	4		
Staff feel encouraged to bring forward new ideas	6	7	1		
Teachers regularly collaborate to plan their teaching	5	8	1		
Staff have a commitment to the whole school and not just their class or syndicate	5	7	2		
Staff participate in important decision making	5	6	3		
Non-teaching staff feel involved in the life of the school	5	6	3		
There is effective communication between senior staff and teachers	5	7	2		
Decision-making processes are fair	5	7	2		
The school allows staff joint planning time	5	9			
Every attempt is made to set challenging standards of achievement for each student	4	10			
If staff have a problem with their teaching they usually turn to colleagues for help	4	10			
Disruption in classes is dealt with promptly so that learning for all students can proceed	4	8	2		
The school communicates clearly to parents the standard of work it expects from students.	4	8	2		
Students respect teachers	4	6	4		
Extra curricular activities provide valuable opportunities for all students	3	7	4		
Teachers regularly discuss ways of improving students' learning	3	9	1		1
Teachers pay attention to keeping the school environment attractive	3	9	2		
Whole school meetings are worthwhile	3	9	2		
Teachers have a say in topics selected for the school's staff development programme	3	7	3		1
Students in this school are enthusiastic about learning	3	9	2		
Teachers share similar beliefs and attitudes about effective teaching/learning	3	8	2	1	
There is effective communication among teachers	3	7	4		
The senior staff communicate a clear vision of where the school is going	3	11			
Adults (teachers) as well as students learn in this school	2	11	1		
Expectations about school work are communicated	2	12			

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The school now	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	No response
clearly to all students					
There is regular staff discussion about how to achieve school goals and targets	2	9	3		
Parents are clear about behaviour standards expected in school	2	9	3		
Staff ensure that students receive constructive feedback about their work	1	10	3		
The school development plan includes practical ways of evaluating success in achieving goals and targets	1	8	5		
At staff meetings time is spent on important things rather than on minor issues	1	10	3		
Non-teaching staff have input into the school strategic plan	1	1	8	3	1
Teachers regularly observe each other in the classroom and give each other feedback	1		7	6	
Students have some say in the school strategic plan	1	5	4	4	
Staff development time is used effectively in the school		8	5	1	
Standards set for students are consistently upheld across the school		10	2	2	

Table 28

Teachers' Views of Change Over Last 3–4 Years (n=13)

Change over the last 3–4 years	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	No response
We expect more of our students	1	3	2	1	6
We enjoy our work more	3	4	1		5
We have made positive changes to the way we teach	2	6			5
Student behaviour has improved		3	2		8
We have made positive changes to the way the school runs	5	3			5
We have more professional development		1	3	1	8
We have more contact with other schools		1	3	1	8
We have made positive changes to how we plan ahead	4	4			5
We monitor our progress more	3	3	1		6
Parents show more interest in their children's learning		2	3		8
We acknowledge children's cultures more	2	1	3		7
We make more use of te reo Māori	2	2	3		6

TUNA NUI SCHOOL

Introduction

Tuna Nui School Profile

School type	Contributing primary	
Roll size	255	
Decile rating	4	
Locality	Suburban	
Student ethnicity	Pākehā	– 40%
	Māori	– 32%
	Pasifika	– 15%
	Other	– 13%
Staffing entitlement	11	
Actual staffing	11	
Recommended	By university and college of education staff as an improving school. The principal's work was known to NZCER and the principal was active in her cluster, organising professional development workshops.	

Tuna Nui School is a contributing primary school in an outer suburban area. In the last 7 years Tuna Nui School has had many changes in senior management, including 4 different principals in a 5-year period, 5 assistant principals, and 5 senior teachers.

The school has large grounds, including a swimming pool and 3 adventure playgrounds, and recent roll growth has necessitated the building of a new classroom block. However, the administration block is yet to be remodelled, and while the reception area is pleasant and welcoming, it is small, cramped, and dated in layout. The school does not have a purpose-built hall, although one is being built, and school assemblies are held in a space created from 2 adjoining classrooms. The staffroom is in a renovated classroom. Several people we interviewed emphasised the importance of school environment, pointing out that parents are often influenced in their choice of school by the standard of buildings. "Market position" is an issue for staff, as school funding is linked with the numbers of students on the school roll.

The roll has increased from 193 to 255 students in the past 3 years. This reflects improved community perceptions of the school, rather than demographic changes. The 13 percent of children classified as "other" include Asian, Croatian, and South African students.

The school has a reputation in the local area as being particularly supportive and welcoming to students with special learning needs, and seeks to create learning which is as inclusive as possible. The school's practice of catering for children who require additional support with their learning has attracted additional enrolments.

There are 5 junior, 2 middle, and 3 senior classes, as well as 3 classes from a special school.

We chose this school because the principal is active in her cluster, organising professional development workshops attended by teachers across her region, because an NZCER researcher had previously discussed her work at the school with her, and because it was recommended as an improving school by personnel at the local university college of education. The most recent ERO report in 1998 included comment on the current principal's good leadership, particularly in relation to the teaching of te reo and tikanga Māori, generally good quality governance, quality learning programmes, and the pleasant and friendly tone of the school.

In this school we interviewed the principal, the assistant principal, the literacy and science team, a long-serving member of the board of trustees, 3 teachers from different areas in the school, the Resource Teacher of Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) attached to the school, the executive officer, a teacher's aide, and a group of 3 parents.

The school prospectus identifies that the school aims to:

> - provide a balanced programme of education which meets the needs of each individual child (intellectual, physical, spiritual and emotional);
> - provide equal opportunities for all pupils;
> - value and honour the rich variety of cultural backgrounds which contribute to the unique make-up of our school.
>
> It is committed to –
>
> - the development of a positive and affirming climate for learning;
> - a school-wide structured approach to behaviour management with expectations which are shared by teachers, pupils, and the community;
> - assessment, evaluation and ongoing individual educational programmes for all children with special needs and abilities;
> - fostering values in our pupils which encourage high self esteem, respect for others, a co-operative approach to learning, taking responsibility for ourselves.
>
> School Prospectus

Tuna Nui School provides children with a wide variety of extracurricular activities to supplement classroom programmes. The primary schools in the local area join together for cultural and sporting activities. Teachers told us how the culture of each of the children is supported and valued, and parents and other family members are encouraged to share their strengths with the school. The school has a Māori culture and Kapa Haka group, and a Samoan group, and is seeking to encourage the community and parents to establish groups for other cultures.

A recurring theme in our interviews was the perceived inadequacy of the operational funding the schools receives, because of its decile 4 classification. According to the principal, many families lack the financial and personal resources to contribute significantly to the work of the school. In one of our case study schools, fund-raising brought in significant additional income, and there are some schools in New Zealand that have parents with the time, contacts, and entrepreneurial skills to raise over $50,000 annually. In this school's area, fund-raising requires prodigious effort for meagre results. We were told that a group of parents who had been involved in the past had "burnt out" because of the effort required to raise comparatively small amounts of money. For example, the traditional school gala is no longer held, as it is seen as a financial "waste of time". As a consequence, staff and board members have felt compelled to take on fund-raising responsibilities that in other communities are managed by groups of parents, and the principal is constantly vigilant for opportunities to bring funds into the school through grants, trusts, and outside agencies. Despite the school's need for money, it resisted the incentives offered by bulk funding of teachers' salaries.

The board attempts to set aside a proportion of the annual budget for new initiatives: "something new and fresh every year, rather than assuming you are too poor to do anything" (principal).

The lack of resources identified by the school was apparent, although it was evident that the available resources are managed effectively by maximising the collective strengths of staff. Traditional role boundaries tend to be blurred; for example, the executive officer, originally employed as a teachers' aide, as well as fulfilling more traditional tasks, also maintains the school computers, designs and maintains the school's website, takes classes for singing, and participates in the Samoan culture group. In our time at the school, we were impressed by the obvious unity within the staff, the encouragement and respect shown to adults and children, and the obvious commitment of the whole staff to each other, to the school, and to the community.

The factors that appear to have contributed to school improvement at Tuna Nui School are:

- leadership;
- strengthening expectations and systems for student behaviour;
- developments in curriculum and assessment;
- focus on learning of children with special educational needs;
- connecting families and school.

Leadership

The leadership of the current principal was described as being central to improvements in this school. She brought a sense of stability to a school that had been required to adapt to a succession of new leaders, each beginning new initiatives, and then moving on before changes had been "bedded in".

The impact of high staff turnover was cushioned somewhat by a small group of staff who have "literally given a lifetime to the families of this community" (principal), including a teacher aide and 3 teachers with a collective service at the school of 150 years.

The principal has lived in the area for many years, and her work in a range of educational roles, including previous teaching at this school, has allowed her to appreciate local issues which affect children. Her extensive knowledge of community networks is harnessed in support of families and children, and was acknowledged as "an incredible asset" by parents we interviewed. She described her role as "opening up windows and doors for these children" as well as "nurturing children and their families".

She is respected by local Māori, and her valuing of Māori kaupapa and language has encouraged Māori families to view the school as a positive educational option for their children. A parent with a commitment to bilingual education explained, "Culturally things aren't taken for granted. It is *valued* that my child is bilingual." A Māori teacher told us that "Māori kids don't fail here" and that parents feel more confident approaching the school because "the fact that she is Māori is a comfort factor for brown people when they see her".

Her determination to ensure that parents feel able to approach the school has meant that she sets aside other tasks to deal with "the constant, unexpected humanity that comes in the door". Willingness to give time to parents and to follow up on their concerns has built credibility, and encouraged closer school–family links. A consequence of her availability to parents is that frequently she is unable to complete management tasks until late in the day or evening.

According to a senior teacher, the principal has been able to build commitment to school goals. "It's all down to [her]. Her philosophy. She was able to develop it with the team she had. She models it. 'If you are coming to our school these are the things you are going to have to do.'." The school has a team of staff who appear to have a genuine and shared commitment to positive and affirming approaches to learning, to positive behaviour management, to meeting the needs of diverse learners, and to fostering proactive values. In the principal's view, collaborative leadership "takes an awful lot of time and energy, but the payoffs are endless". Given that change is in itself energy consuming, we were struck by the enormity of the challenge she took on, as an inexperienced principal in a school that had lived with constant changes in leadership. It is a tribute both to her leadership and to the dedication of staff that they were prepared to engage yet again in a new change process, and trust that this principal would be around to follow through. Several teachers told us of the encouragement and support that the principal put in place to build common understandings and to build staff capacity.

We also noted the leadership shown by other staff members, particularly in curriculum and assessment, and in the design and implementation of effective systems for children with diverse needs.

Strengthening Expectations and Systems for Student Behaviour

Staff and parents considered that efforts to raise the "tone" of the school are achieving results.

The shared school behaviour model is built on a foundation of strongly positive relationships between children and staff, and amongst children. Emphasis is given to maintaining an environment that is consistent, fair, and informal. A teacher relatively new to the school explained:

> You are consistent with children, you treat them with respect, but you don't need to be clinical, wear your corporate outfit. Everyone is allowed to be themselves.

This teacher said that when she began teaching at the school, she was struck by the respect shown to the children, and by the way teachers spoke about children whose behaviour wasn't "up to scratch". "Teachers said 'So and so needs some extra support.' They didn't blame the kids."

All teachers are expected to develop positive behavioural goals with their classes, which enable children to be safe and secure, and which encourage a settled learning environment.

Overall, the approach to behaviour management emphasises reinforcement of desired behaviours. The school subscribes to the "catch them being good" approach, and teachers and teachers' aides on playground duty are alert to opportunities to hand out "fair play" stickers that go into a draw for prizes at Friday morning assemblies.

Children who transgress are seen as having "chosen" this behaviour, and therefore having "chosen" through their actions to accept consequences. Usually this involves discussion and encouragement to choose more appropriate behaviours. Children may be helped to target an aspect of their behaviour they'd like to work on, and their progress will be monitored and reinforced.

Preventative discipline strategies are also used, with teachers "cueing in" students before play/lunch times, e.g., "Who will you play with?" "Where will you play?" Teachers are encouraged to check up after breaks to reinforce appropriate choices.

The behaviour management system described above could, in a less supportive context, become rather mechanistic and technical. However, because it is built on a culture of valuing children, and "accentuating the positives", it contributes to an overall climate of positive expectation for children. A teacher told us that in her view:

> If a child is safe and happy they can learn. There's not a lot we can do about their home environment, but there's a lot we can do about the school environment.

Developments in Curriculum and Assessment

At the heart of efforts to improve learning and teaching is the effective alignment of curriculum, teaching, and assessment. Attention to assessment had a strong impact upon what Tuna Nui teachers taught and how they taught it. Starting at the end of the process, that is, "What is it that we want our students to know and be able to do?" encouraged teachers to focus on the outcomes of learning and then work backwards to the sort of curriculum content and pedagogy that would help children to get there.

During this process, teachers worked with national curriculum documents to develop understandings of national expectations for student learning. One senior teacher was critical of the speed with which new documents were introduced, and the professional development that accompanied them:

> I am critical of the way curriculum documentation came out with poor funding for professional development. The funding should just come. It should be for the whole staff. To send two people off on a course and expect them to come back and inform the whole staff is unfair and ineffective. There just isn't the time.

She considered that teachers did not have sufficient time to develop confidence and understanding of a new curriculum document before another one was introduced. As a result, teachers were uncertain about what to teach, as well as being anxious that they might not be able to "cover" what they were meant to.

The teacher who led many of the developments in assessment had had the experience of being employed in the NEMP project[8] for a period of time. This increased her knowledge and understanding of sound assessment practice, and allowed her to bring skills gained during this time back into her school. She helped teachers to realise that they had to review the school's assessment policy, and update their assessment methodology.

In addition, the school was able to take advantage of a timely opportunity to work with university personnel on the Project Abel contract.[9] This encouraged a focus on the key goals of the school, and strategies for achieving these. One teacher described this as "It's been a huge change. It's given us clarity. Made us think about what is important for our school. What do *our* kids need?" She highlighted the value to the school of having an outside facilitator who worked *with* the school to develop assessment options that were appropriate for their school, and which affirmed and built on existing good practice: "It was so encouraging to have an outside professional who affirmed 'This is on the right track.'."

The strengths of this project appeared to be the way that teachers gained knowledge within their own school context, and the fact that there was time for new understandings to be reflected in actual practice. "Slowly and systematically we started to implement change." (teacher)

This project involved the teachers in reading and discussion, which contributed to a strategic plan for targeted assessment in the number strand in mathematics. Samples of children's work in maths were collected across the school, and benchmarked for different achievement levels. This helped teachers identify where they were teaching well, and where they needed to improve. They selected examples of children's work at different curriculum levels, and talked about their rationales for their decisions. Over time, they came to a shared understanding of agreed standards for different achievement levels.

Teachers then worked with written language samples, and created exemplars of children's work in a range of curriculum areas. These are described as "standards portfolios" that contain examples of children's work classified in relation to curriculum levels 1, 2, and 3. Because of the wish to show progress within curriculum levels, samples are further classified as "early", "middle", and "fluent". Discussion and careful examination of students' work, coupled with exploration of curriculum documents, has enabled teachers to be specific about the purpose of each exemplar, and relate it to curriculum objectives. Several teachers mentioned their interest in the AsTTle[10] tools for assessing literacy and numeracy for Years 5–7. They anticipate that these tools will give them additional information about their students' levels of achievement against national standards.

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[8] NEMP is the National Education Monitoring Project, which provides information about the achievement of representative samples of New Zealand students in Year 4 and Year 8.

[9] Project Abel (Assessment for Better Learning) is a Ministry of Education professional development contract for teachers.

The following sequence shows how planning and assessment processes build on each other:

1. Broad overviews of yearly/term curriculum content are developed collaboratively.
2. Topic overviews for the year are settled.
3. An assessment overview is decided upon: "What is important for us to assess?" "When/how will we assess it?"
4. All planning and outcomes are linked to curriculum statements.
5. Assessment and teacher planning are linked.
6. Standards, portfolios, and benchmarks contribute to shared expectations for student achievement.
7. Benchmarks are fully annotated, so that it is clear what the exemplar is an example of, and what the defining characteristics of this exemplar are.
8. School reports link to all of the above, and identify curriculum levels.

As well as the use of exemplars, teachers make use of national monitoring information from the NEMP project. The school formulated a school-wide literacy questionnaire to gather information about literacy knowledge and practice, based on NEMP publications. Some of the NEMP instruments have been used by the school as additional assessment tools.

Teachers and the principal noted that most of the development work occurred after school and in teachers' own time. "We worked so hard," acknowledges a senior teacher. "It would have been helpful to have to have had (national) exemplars at each level. It would have made such a difference."

Individual student portfolios contribute to the assessment of learning, and annotated exemplars of student work are pasted into individual folders as a record of student progress. Portfolios are shared with parents twice a year to help communicate their child's progress in key learning areas. Teachers said that they "made a decision to be very frank with parents". Examples are chosen to reflect the learning process, not just final products. For example, the steps of "brainstorming", draft writing, editing, and "publishing" are included to illustrate steps toward the achievement of outcomes. Samples also attempt to convey the purpose of the assessment, and what it shows about a child's learning. For example, a spelling test in a child's portfolio would be annotated to explain what the test shows about the stage in spelling the child has reached, and indicate whether the child is currently achieving below, within, or above his/her age level. Where children are identified as working "below" age level, teachers will "suggest to parents how they might help—games, websites, learning heavy duty words for example".

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[10] AsTTle refers to Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning that are being developed for the Ministry of Education by the University of Auckland and the University of New South Wales.

Parents spoke warmly of developments in the use of portfolios:

> They're a lot easier to follow now. We know what our kids are doing. We can compare where they first started to where they are now. It's great for a parent to see the progress. Years ago they didn't have any of that stuff. At 'meet the teacher' it was just talking, no visual stuff. To me talking means absolutely nothing. Parents get it (the portfolio) a week before the interviews—we can compare and write questions.

Another parent said:

> It's a real joy for the children to bring home their portfolios. They can see the progression themselves. My husband and I really nut it out. We make it a family affair. We use it as a parent tool to talk about progress with our children.

In these examples, parents focus on the *progress* and learning evidenced by their children, rather than comparison with the level of achievement, despite the fact that this is signalled on each sample in the portfolio.

The school has obviously given much thought and time to improving assessment practices. In the view of teachers, this time has been well spent:

- Teachers now understand and can talk about key assessment principles. They can use terminology accurately; which allows for better communication about teaching and learning.
- As end points are defined more specifically, teaching has been better directed towards the achievement of these outcomes.
- Assessment is built into planning and teaching processes, rather than as an "add on".
- Assessment better reflects teaching intentions.
- There are common understandings of important indicators for student achievement among teachers, and expectations are clearer for children and parents.
- There is a greater variety of ways of assessing learning.
- Teachers have better data on individual children's learning needs, and they are clearer about next learning steps.
- Achievement levels have been raised.

As well as the focus on assessment, aspects of school organisation were examined:

> We had a huge amount of fitness and physical education in the timetable. This was taking time away from literacy. We cut it right back. (senior teacher)

To enhance the delivery of curriculum, curriculum development committees were created for mathematics, English, science, and technology. Teachers were supported to develop greater knowledge in literacy and numeracy. The school funded all of its teachers to attend national reading and mathematics conferences. The school also looked outwards for external guidance to improve curriculum delivery. It is currently on the Ministry of Education Literacy Leadership contract, and there has been professional development in mathematics teaching.

There is a strong emphasis on collective planning. Planning sheets have been streamlined to improve the instructional focus and links to curriculum documents, and to simplify the planning tasks for teachers. At the end of each term, planning nights are held for the teachers to get together and collectively plan overviews for the next term. These nights help teachers to use each other's strengths, provide support for new teachers, and contribute to team building. It enables all teachers to complete the term knowing that their responsibilities for the next term are clarified, and helps with workload. Before this occurred, a teacher told us that "people weren't sure what they had to cover".

So far, this school's improvement efforts have been aimed at improving curriculum and assessment knowledge, and achieving stronger organisational coherence in these areas. There is a clear translation of mandated curriculum objectives into the curriculum as it is experienced by students. Teachers base their teaching and assessment practices on learning outcomes which derive from curriculum achievement objectives. Assessment practices measure student attainment of these outcomes.

The 1998 ERO report comments favourably on the school's curriculum statements, systems and guidelines, and consistency of school planning. The report notes:

> Staff assess students against predetermined achievement objectives and effectively use the assessment information to plan future learning activities. Systems for monitoring the progress of students are well established. Progress information is shared amongst staff and with parents. Newly developed individual portfolios of students' work encouraged parents to share their observations with teachers. The effectiveness of these portfolios should be evaluated when they are more firmly established. Staff have begun to develop methods of aggregating school-wide student achievement information and procedures for evaluating the overall effectiveness of their learning programmes.

Focus on Learning of Children with Special Needs

> My kids have had a great foundation for schooling and a love of learning. In my day if you were a bit behind they gave up on you and you fell behind. The love and support my kids have had here . . . (parent)

All children at Tuna Nui are expected to learn, and the school has well-developed systems and processes to ensure that "no-one falls through the gaps". Teachers are able to cater for a range of activities within their classrooms, and have strategies to adapt curriculum expectations to meet particular learning needs.

The special needs policy states that "Every person will have the opportunity to access the support needed to meet their special needs. This means that in some cases extra programmes, resources and/or support will be made available." The policy is intended to ensure the early identification of children who need additional support in their learning or behaviour, and to build a mutual commitment between families and the school to address the issues. At times community and outside agencies may be enlisted to help.

The programme is overseen by a teacher with responsibility for Special Needs Coordination (SENCO). A well-developed flowchart has been designed to illustrate the process which ensures that ownership and capacity for productive teaching of children with special needs is embedded within the school. At any stage in the process, a teacher can refer to an in-school Special Needs Committee if it is felt that advice and guidance is needed. Classroom monitoring data is collected to gain a full picture of needs and competencies. Where data shows that in-class adaptations are not resulting in acceptable gains for a particular student, the Special Needs Committee will meet to review what has been tried, and to consider possible next steps. If it has not occurred earlier, parents will be involved at this stage, and possibly the services of a Resource Teacher for Behaviour and Learning (RTLB) also.

Some children present with significant behavioural difficulties, and a behavioural plan may be developed with the RTLB, class teacher, parent, and child. Where it is considered that there are deeper issues, counselling is available with a social worker or counsellor.

The school has an extensive range of in-school interventions which may be used as additional supports for children. In literacy, these include Reading Recovery, individual reading support, a parent reading scheme, the Four Minute Reading Programmes, Paired Reading and Paired Writing. There is also a programme for children with English as their second language (NESB). Booster classes are held for children who enrol at the school from other schools, and who have significant educational gaps which prevent them from engaging fully in classroom programmes. Enrichment classes for children with special abilities are also provided.

In all of these programmes, liaison with homes is a priority, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation is built in. Special needs tracking sheets show careful documentation of student progress.

Staffing for these initiatives is provided by 6 teacher aides, who work on both individual and small group programmes. The school has ready access to an RTLB, and an RTLB Māori. The SENCO oversees all special needs programmes, and has facilitated most meetings with outside agencies and services.

From 2002, teachers will strengthen the integration of individual education plans (IEPs) into classroom planning and assessment. Teacher aides will have further professional development in reading, computers, and behaviour programmes.

The role of teacher aides in this school appears to have been enhanced significantly beyond that of aide to the teacher. For example, a teacher aide is able to facilitate the Four Minute Reading Programme. She has been trained by the RTLB (Māori), who also supervises and supports the delivery of the programme. This programme is targeted at Māori children in mainstream situations. Children are selected for the programme if there is teacher concern about their reading or spelling levels, or if they transfer from another school, and gaps are shown in their entrance assessment.

In discussing her role with her, it was obvious that the teacher aide could talk confidently about the programme. Children are on the programme for as long as it takes for them to achieve full mastery of each of 5 stages. The average is approximately 2 terms of daily teaching. Once all stages are achieved, a current reading level and reading age vocabulary test is given, and monitoring continues for one more term.

A Home Tutor has been employed from the community to reinforce the links between children on the Four Minute Reading Programme and their homes. She keeps in regular contact with the families by phone, and arranges a home visit every 2 weeks. After each stage is completed at school, the stage is repeated at home to consolidate gains. The key role of the home tutor is to encourage families to create contexts in their homes that support learning. She models how to engage with the programme, and motivate learning: "We teach them 100 ways of saying 'good'." A Māori parent told us, "Man, that programme was really good. We had to work with him, do little exercises . . . he's the best reader in our family now." In addition to reinforcing and consolidating learning, this has also become a way to build links between home and school. For example, much of the school's consultation with Māori was done informally during the Four Minute Reading Programme. This programme is being formally evaluated by Massey University.

The same teacher aide teaches the NESB programme for 32 children each week. Team overviews are developed with teacher assistance, but the teacher aide feels confident to teach from these. "For NESB I can look at a term overview and can plan what they need from this." She believes that the programme complements the phonics work that is done in classrooms.

The school is also involved in another literacy project with the University of Auckland, on how commercially available reading programmes are used to strengthen children's learning. The school has selected the Magic Box series, and part of the inducement to participate was the provision of $1,000 worth of reading materials. As the programme is ongoing for another 2 years, there are no results yet on its effectiveness.

The school also accesses outside sources of support, including the Communication Initiative, the Moderates Contract, the Behaviour Education Support Team (BEST), an itinerant teacher of the deaf, Marinoto Health Clinic, the Public Health Nurse, and CYFS.

The picture emerges of a school that is determined to participate in any project which it believes has the potential to enhance outcomes for children. Some are classroom-based and some are "add-ons". While formal evaluation of the Four Minute Reading and Magic Box programmes is not yet available, there is some evidence that the school's efforts may be making a difference for some children. The principal gave an example of 2 transient boys whose reading levels moved from Level 1 to Level 20 in a year. In the principal's view, these gains were attributable to sound, targeted classroom teaching and participation in an NESB group, and the Four Minute Reading Programme. Information on the relative benefits of different interventions would allow the school to identify those which are of the most benefit, so that strategic decisions can be made about where efforts might be most usefully directed.

Connecting Families and School

A feature of this school is its determination to reach out to families to build a strong, positive connection between the school and parents. It is seen as a school responsibility to create a school climate that makes parents feel welcome in the school, treats them with sensitivity, acknowledges the knowledge and experiences that children bring from home, keeps parents informed, and helps them to participate meaningfully in their children's learning. One young teacher described this as "getting alongside parents". She said that:

> In my previous experience, some schools blame parents for not having contact between school and home. They say 'they need to be partners with us', but there is no opportunity for them to do so. We believe that all parents want the best for their kids, but often they may not know how, for example, that talking to them makes lots of difference.

"Getting alongside parents" begins before formal school enrolment. The school works on developing proactive links with early childhood centres in the district. The adventure playground and swimming pool are available to a nearby kohanga reo and playcentre. Students from the school regularly offer to perform for early childhood centres.

In addition, the school actively promotes itself to prospective parents by being part of information evenings in local early childhood centres. "There's no use having a good product if people don't know about it," asserted the principal. All the teachers from the junior area of the school attend these meetings, so that parents have the opportunity to meet all the staff. The principal considers that "one of the sellers is the way we *assess* children; the way we *know* where children are at academically, as well as our great personal environment".

The principal stresses the importance of maintaining public visibility. Considerable time is spent in seeking ways to market the school, including letter drops, advertising in local papers, early childhood information visits, and school performances at early childhood centres. The school has appeared on national television, and connections with local reporters ensure that good news stories about the school appear regularly in local newspapers.

When Year 1 children are enrolled, they receive a New Entrant pack containing a "Welcome to Tuna Nui" sunhat, a pencil, a prospectus, and information for parents on how to assist with reading at home.

All children in Years 1–2 are given holiday packs containing resources to reinforce work done in school, such as alphabet games and word games. As children are already familiar with these activities, they are encouraged to play them with family members. Teachers believe that the holiday packs strengthen family involvement in learning.

The school also holds regular curriculum evenings to show families how different curriculum areas are taught in the school. Children are welcome at these evenings, and frequently demonstrate for their families.

At a typical evening the curriculum document is discussed, teachers show how this is reflected in their planning, and examples are provided which illustrate children's learning.

For example, in the technology curriculum evening, teachers arranged workshops so that parents and children could explore various technology activities.

Parents have also been informed about the school's assessment processes, particularly in the interpretation of portfolios and school reports.

Because some parents may initially lack confidence in helping within the school, the principal has developed strategies to "hook them in". She asks for help with simple easily accomplished tasks first, and then builds their confidence so that they gradually take on more responsibility. "We nurture our children and our families here." Consequently there is significant parental involvement within the school, despite the fact that "families are under stress; lack of money, jobs and relational issues" (principal).

There is also high attendance at annual general meetings. Over 100 people attended the last AGM. The strategy is to "invite them all. Make sure that we have children performing. Everyone gets a lollypop and we have spot prizes. The evening lasts for one hour only." (principal)

Recently the principal has initiated a community approach to the achievement of Māori students. She facilitated a meeting for Māori with two other schools, which was well attended. Goals have been identified to enhance achievement of Māori students, and strategies have been identified to meet them. One such strategy will be to target local students to enter Australian Mathematics and Science tests. Students will be given specific tuition in examination techniques, and in extending their learning, with a view to gaining high test scores.

Students' Views of Their Experiences at School

The 26 Year 6 students are clearly positive about their relationship with their teachers, who are perceived as supportive, encouraging, and fair. Overall, they feel that they have good friends and that the playground is generally safe. For some children, bullying is seen as an issue. Half of the children sometimes feel upset, discouraged, and bored, despite their acknowledgment of teacher support.

Children were effusive in their comments about what they liked best about the school. Their comments show that they feel valued and that teachers and others go out of their way to support them.

> I like everything about this school. The teachers are kind and the principal. I would never change anything about this school.
>
> The teachers are always there when we need their help.
>
> The teachers are always fair to us.
>
> All the time I can get help when I need help. The teachers teach us cool and interesting topics.
>
> The teachers explain something again if I don't get it. I always get treated friendly. The teacher speaks nicely to me. I never get bulied.

They appreciate the school environment and facilities:

> The environment is nice and cool places we can play and we have an eco-corner.
>
> There's a great library.

They also appreciate opportunities to go on trips (6 comments) and to participate in "fun" activities (4). Children enjoyed playing with their friends (7), and playing games (4). Curriculum areas identified as being liked best were maths (3), reading (2), topics (3), music (1). We thought one student summed it up pretty well when he wrote:

> Getting to meet new friends, working well with my class, having fun learning, doing fun activities, my teacher, going on trips, meeting new teachers, playing computer.

In the section which asked them to tell us what they would like to change about the school, 8 wrote "nothing", and 2 left the section blank. Others wrote:

> Absolutely nothing at all.
>
> Nothing. I like the school the way it is. It's a wonderful exciting school.
>
> Not much, because it's great the way it is.

Overall, 13 children could identify nothing that they would like to change. With one exception, no suggestion for improvement was made by more than one person. Two people wanted to change "the bullying we don't like", and "the bullies". Otherwise, suggestions referred to further property and playground development, such as:

> A pool a bit longer, more time outside, a proper hall and another pair of bars to swing on.
>
> Bigger classes.
>
> Bigger pool, more art and big hall, but otherwise it's just fine.

All of these answers, and the responses to statements, indicate that the school is a positive, exciting place, where learning is enjoyable most of the time, for most of the students.

The 26 Year 4 students had very positive views about their teachers, seeing them as kind and fair, and as telling students when they do good work. Most considered that they like school and their work, that they try hard, and their teacher helps them to do better work.

Most students thought that children behave well in class only sometimes, and almost a half felt safe in the playground only sometimes.

Most Year 4 students referred to learning and curriculum (10) and playing (8) as things they liked best about the school. Comments about learning included:

> I like lurning.
>
> Learning basic facks.
>
> Well the best thing I like doing is English—it's cool.
>
> I like learning and studying and I like the teachers.

Six children specifically referred to their teachers:

> My teachers are always kind and helpful.
>
> I like it because all the teachers are very friendly and they help you whenever you need help.

Children clearly value their teachers, whom they see as kind, friendly, and willing to give them the help that they need to learn.

Opportunities to play with their friends outside on the playground are also important to 6 of these children. The school's improvements to the playground are appreciated for their intrinsic enjoyment and for enhancing play with peers.

In response to the question about what they would like to change, 14 left the section blank. Suggestions for change (10) all related to the playground—"swings", "season", "more trees"—or to the desire to have "bigger classrooms".

Teachers' Views

Profile of Teachers Who Completed Surveys

Sex	Female	9
	Male	2
Position	Classroom teacher	5
	AD/DP	2
	Senior teacher	1
	Specialist teacher	1
	Part-time teacher	1
	Other (SENCO)	1
Years of teaching experience	Less than 2	1
	2–4 years	1
	5–10 years	3
	11–20 years	3
	21 plus years	3

Years at Tuna Nui School	Less than 2	4
	2–4 years	3
	5–10 years	3
	11–20 years	
	21 plus years	1
Qualifications	Diploma of Teaching (7), Teaching Certificate (2), BEd (2), Diploma of Education, 2/3rds BEd, BA	
Membership of professional organisations	NZEI (5), QPEC, Regional Reading Association, International Reading Association	

The 11 teachers who completed surveys reported strongly positive perceptions about the quality of leadership and management in the school, a collective commitment, and shared expectations in relation to children and to their learning. Overall results from the teacher questionnaires indicate very high positive perceptions about almost all items.

The statements which teachers agreed with most were related to the school's primary emphasis on learning, and conditions to support teaching and learning. The most highly rated, where all teachers were in agreement, and most teachers in strong agreement, were the following items:

- The school allows staff joint planning time.
- Teachers in this school believe all children can learn.
- Students are clear about standards of behaviour expected in the school.
- Adults (teachers) as well as students learn in this school.

Most strongly agreed that student success is celebrated, and that there is regular staff discussion about how to achieve school goals and targets.

Items on which there was most uncertainty were whether support staff and students have some say in the strategic plan, and whether students respect teachers. Items on which there were variable responses, ranging from strong agreement to disagreement, were:

- Teachers regularly observe each other in the classroom and give each other feedback.
- Students have some say in the strategic plan.

Overall, most teachers agreed that expectations for student achievement were higher, and that they enjoyed their work more. All agreed that there had been positive changes to the way the school runs, and to the way they taught. Half of the teachers strongly agreed that children's cultures were acknowledged more, and that more use was made of te reo Māori.

Teachers identified a large number of achievements the school had made in the past 3–4 years. Nearly half the teachers pointed to improvements in student assessment, and in particular to the use of assessment portfolios.

The quality of leadership and management was highlighted, with teachers referring to the lifting of expectations, high staff morale, and improvements in communication, and to collaborative whole school approaches to reviews, achievement, budgets, and staff development. Five teachers also commented on improvements in classroom and playground environments.

Teachers identified that current strengths of the school are strong interpersonal relationships and respect, for example:

> An environment in which individuals are respected, needs acknowledged, and systems and programmes put in place to encourage them to move forward and achieve to the best of their ability.
>
> Everyone is made to feel part of this family.

Teachers saw the staff as a "strong team committed to each other and to the students". Several comments referred to the school's commitment to high-quality programmes for children with special learning needs.

There was no clear pattern with regard to teachers' views of future changes, apart from a clear wish for smaller class sizes.

Support Staff Views

Profile of Support Staff Who Completed Surveys

Sex	Female	7
	Male	1
Position	Teacher aide	7
	Deputy librarian	
	Office manager	
	Office assistant	
	Caretaker/cleaner	1
Years at Tuna Nui School	Less than 2	4
	2–4 years	3
	5–10 years	1
	11–20 years	
	21 plus years	
Qualifications	Teacher aide Certificate, courses in various areas	
Membership of professional organisations	NZEI	

Support staff were also strongly positive in their perceptions of the school with almost all the 8 staff who completed surveys agreeing or strongly agreeing with all statements. Their strongest agreements were in relation to a staff focus on student learning and acknowledgment of students' work, prompt treatment of disruptive behaviour, the learning of adults, and support for new staff.

Support staff are positive about their role in the school; they enjoy their jobs and feel involved in the life of the school, including their input into the strategic plan. They appreciate the work of teachers, and are supportive of the role of the board of trustees.

Three of the support staff saw the enhanced reputation of the school and the accompanying roll growth as the major achievements of the school over the past 3–4 years.

They regarded major strengths of the school as the way all staff worked as a team, "to support each other in a positive way to achieve the best results from the students". Comments were made about the respect shown to the diverse cultures represented at the school, and the way support staff worked closely with parents to improve children's learning.

Support staff identified continuing development of school buildings, resources, and facilities as central to future school improvement.

Summary

A constant theme for Tuna Nui School is the positive linkages that the school makes with families, early childhood centres, other schools, and external agencies, in order to work with them to enhance the wellbeing and learning of students. The school takes the initiative in creating connections, such as going *to* early childhood centres as well as inviting their involvement and opening school facilities to them, setting the ball rolling for a community approach to Māori achievement, encouraging family members to share cultural knowledge with the school, liaising closely with families, and showing processes of student learning in portfolios in order to make these processes apparent to families.

A second theme is the school's respect for the diversity of the student population, and its attention to individual backgrounds, strengths, and needs. The school has worked persistently to cater for individuals and groups, putting emphasis on raising Māori achievement, identifying early those children who need additional support in learning or behaviour, providing a programme for children with English as a second language, holding "booster" classes for children from other schools who have significant educational gaps, and providing enrichment classes for children with special abilities.

A third theme is that the school knows what it expects in terms of student learning. Teachers have collectively generated clear benchmarks for student performance, and curriculum and pedagogy reflect an understanding of student interests and needs.

Underpinning the school's efforts is a culture of trust, openness, and respect for others. Innovation is encouraged, and mistakes are seen as valuable feedback and as opportunities for reflecting on alternative ways of problem solving.

The school is led by a principal and team leaders who share and communicate a passion for children and for learning. Considerable attention is devoted to socialising children to respect and support each other, and to become lively, interested, independent learners. Teachers' professional development has aimed to improve teaching knowledge and classroom practice, so that children's learning is improved.

External factors which affect the school include a perceived shortfall in operating funding for curriculum resources, library and ICT development, and the need to attract enrolments in order to secure sufficient income to manage the school effectively.

The current success of the school has been built on the willingness of staff to devote many additional hours to the school.

Table 29

Year 6 Students' Views of Their Experience at School (n=26)

School is a place where	Mostly	Sometimes	Never/hardly ever	No response
My teacher tells me when I do good work	21	5		
I have good friends	20	5	1	
Teachers explain things clearly to me	20	6		
I like my teachers	20	6		
Teachers treat me fairly	18	7	1	
I enjoy myself	17	9		
The rules are fair	17	9		
Teachers help me to improve my work	16	10		
I can learn what I need for my future	16	9		1
I feel safe in the playground	16	10		
I do interesting things	14	12		
I could do better work if I tried	11	12	2	1
Teachers listen to what I say	11	14	1	
I get all the help I need	10	16		
I learn most things pretty quickly	10	15		1
I keep out of trouble	9	16	1	
Students behave well in my class	4	21	1	
I get a hard time	4	4	18	
I feel lonely	4	4	18	
I feel restless	3	14	9	
I get bullied	3	8	15	
I get upset	2	14	10	
I get tired of trying	2	16	8	
I get bored	2	13	11	

Table 30

Year 4 Students' Views of Their Experience at School (n=26)

School is a place where	Mostly	Sometimes	Never/hardly ever	No response
My teacher is kind to me	22	2		2
My teacher is fair to me	21	1		4
My teacher tells me when I do good work	20	5		1
I like my school	20	5		1
I like my work	18	6		2
I belong in this school	18	6		2
I try hard at school	17	8		1
I feel safe in the playground	14	11		1
My teacher helps me to do better work	14	9		3
Children in my class behave well	1	24		1

Table 31

Teachers' Views of Their School (n=11)

The school now	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	No response
The school allows staff joint planning time	10	1			
Teachers in this school believe that all students can learn	8	3			
Student success is regularly celebrated in this school	9	1	1		
Students are clear about standards of behaviour expected in the school	9	2			
Adults (teachers) as well as students learn in this school	9	2			
There is regular staff discussion about how to achieve school goals and targets	9	1	1		
Teachers regularly monitor the learning and progress of individual children	8	1	1	1	
The primary concern of everyone in the school is student learning	8	3			
Teachers like working in the school	8	3			
Teachers respect students	8	2			1
Staff in this school work hard to promote and maintain good relations with the community	8	3			
Senior staff are available to discuss curriculum/teaching matters	8	1	1		1
Teachers regularly discuss ways of improving students' learning	8	3			
Non-teaching staff feel involved in the life of the school	8	2	1		
Extra-curricular activities provide valuable opportunities for all students	7	3	1		
Teachers regularly collaborate to plan their teaching	7	3	1		
If staff have a problem with their teaching they usually turn to colleagues for help	7	2	2		
The school development plan includes practical ways of evaluating success in achieving goals and targets	7	3	1		
New staff are well supported in this school	7	4			
There is mutual respect between staff and senior staff in this school	7	4			
At staff meetings time is spent on important things rather than on minor issues	7	3	1		
Standards set for students are consistently upheld across the school	7	3	1		
Parents are clear about behaviour standards expected in school	7	3	1		
Teachers believe that all children can be successful	6	5			
Staff encourage students to try their best	6	5			
Students' work is prominently displayed	6	4	1		
The staff encourage parents to be involved in the school	6	3	2		
Expectations about school work are communicated clearly to all students	6	2	3		
Teachers in this school believe that all students can be successful	6	5			
Teachers encourage students to be independent learners	6	3	2		
Staff feel encouraged to bring forward new ideas	6	3	2		
Decision-making processes are fair	6	5			
The senior staff communicate a clear vision of where the school is going	6	5			
Senior staff openly recognise teachers when they do things well	5	4	2		
Every attempt is made to set challenging standards of achievement for each student	5	6			
Staff have a commitment to the whole school and not just their class or syndicate	5	6			
Disruption in classes is dealt with promptly so that learning for all students can proceed	5	5	1		
Staff participate in important decision making	5	6			
Staff development time is used effectively in the school	5	5	1		
There is effective communication between senior staff and teachers	5	4	2		
The board of trustees plays a significant role in supporting developments within the school	5	6			

The school now	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	No response
The school communicates clearly to parents the standard of work it expects from students	5	6			
Teachers have a say in the school strategic plan	5	5	1		
Teachers share similar beliefs and attitudes about effective teaching/learning	5	6			
Staff ensure that students receive constructive feedback about their work	4	7			
Teachers pay attention to keeping the school environment attractive	4	6	1		
Whole school meetings are worthwhile	4	5	2		
Teachers have a say in topics selected for the school's staff development programme	4	5	2		
There is effective communication among teachers	4	6	1		
Students in this school are enthusiastic about learning	3	7	1		
Non-teaching staff have input into the school strategic plan	2	5	4		
Students respect teachers	1	6	4		
Teachers regularly observe each other in the classroom and give each other feedback	1	4	1	5	
Students have some say in the school strategic plan	1	3	6	1	

Table 32

Teachers' Views of Their School (n=9)

Change over the last 3-4 years	Strongly agree n=	Agree n=	Uncertain n=	Disagree n=	Don't know n=	No response n=
We have made positive changes to the way we teach	6	3				
We have made positive changes to the way the school runs	6	3				
We have made positive changes to how we plan ahead	6	2			1	
We acknowledge children's cultures more	6		1		2	
We have more professional development	5	3			1	
We monitor our progress more	5	2			1	1
We make more use of te reo Māori	5	1	1		2	
We expect more of our students	3	5	1			
Student behaviour has improved	3	3	1		2	
Parents show more interest in their children's learning	3	1	2		2	1
We enjoy our work more	2	4	1		1	1
We have more contact with other schools	1	4	2		2	

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Table 33

Support Staff Views of Their School (n=9)

The school now	Strongly agree n=	Agree n=	Uncertain n=	Disagree n=	No response n=
Staff encourage students to try their best	8	1			
Teachers in this school believe that all students can be successful	7	2			
The primary concern of everyone in the school is student learning	7	2			
Adults as well as students learn in this school	7	2			
Student success is regularly celebrated in this school	7	2			
Students' work is prominently displayed	7	2			
New staff are well supported in this school	7	2			
Disruption in classes is dealt with promptly so that learning for all students can proceed	7	1			1
Teachers respect students	6	3			
Staff in the school work hard to promote and maintain good relations with the community	6	3			
The board of trustees plays a significant role in supporting developments within the school	6	3			
Parents are clear about behaviour standards expected in the school	6	2		1	
Support staff like working in the school	5	4			
Teachers in the school believe all students can learn	5	4			
Support staff feel involved in the life of the school	5	4			
Staff have a commitment to the whole school and not just their class or syndicate	5	4			
There is regular staff discussion about how to achieve school goals/targets	5	4			
The senior staff communicate a clear vision of where the school is going	5	4			
Teachers believe that all children can be successful	5	3			1
Students are clear about standards of behaviour expected in the school	5	3		1	
Staff feel encouraged to bring forward new ideas	4	5			
The staff encourage parents to be involved in the school	4	5			
There is effective communication among staff	4	5			
Staff pay attention to keeping the school environment attractive	4	5			
Standards set for students are consistently upheld across the school	4	4	1		
There is mutual respect between staff and senior staff in this school	4	4	1		
Staff development time is used effectively in the school	4	4	1		
Decision-making processes are fair	4	4			1
Whole school meetings are worthwhile	4	4			1
Senior staff openly recognise support staff when they do things well	3	6			
Extra-curricular activities provide valuable opportunities for all students	3	6			
The school development plan includes practical ways of evaluating success	3	6			
The school communicates clearly to parents the standard of work it expects from students	3	5			1
Staff participate in important decision making	3	5			1
At staff meetings time is spent on important things rather than on minor issues	2	2	1		4
Students respect staff	1	7	1		
Students in this school are enthusiastic about learning	1	7			1
Support staff have input into the school strategic plan	1	6	1		1

6. CRISIS TURN-AROUND SCHOOLS

The four crisis turn-around schools suffered poor reputation in the community and falling rolls. In two schools ERO had pinpointed significant concerns which were publicised, the negative publicity contributing to further roll decline. The "crisis" was associated with low staff morale. A new principal was a catalyst for change.

In all schools, a striking feature was the sheer hard work required to turn the school around. Low rolls in one school (Totara) meant that the principal had to teach as well as lead the school, making her workload especially heavy.

There were different approaches to change, with the principal influencing whether the approach was to "shake up" existing staffing teams and structures, or to build a team by drawing on staff strengths.

All schools used outside support and strengthened their working relationship with the board of trustees and parents.

TOTARA SCHOOL

Introduction

Totara School Profile

School type	Full primary	
Roll size	208 at March 2001, 233 at October 2001	
Decile rating	1b	
Locality	Suburban	
Student ethnicity	Māori	– 38%
	Pasifika	– 32%
	Asian	– 15%
	Pākehā	– 15%
Staffing entitlement	9.96	
Actual staffing	11.8	
Recommended	By School Support adviser as a school that operates effectively against the odds.	

Totara School is a decile 1b full primary school situated in a low-income industrial area. It suffered from a poor image, and the roll dropped to the point where it was at risk of closure. For several years it has been acknowledged as an improving school by ERO and by the educational community, and the recent roll growth reflects this. However, many local families still bypass the school, relying on indicators such as the decile ranking, rather than visiting the school to judge for themselves. The board chair referred to ongoing efforts to overcome the school's past reputation, and the "stigma" of its decile ranking as a "battle". This has entailed rejecting negative stereotypes of the area, and promoting a sense of pride in the school, as well as striving to improve the quality of education that it offers.

When the current principal was appointed 7 years ago, there were just 120 students, too few to entitle her to be released from teaching. She was required to teach a class of 35 Years 7 and 8 students, as well as manage the school. In her view, teaching made it extremely difficult for her to provide the leadership required to lift school performance. Gradually, as the school roll grew, she was able to spend more time on school management.

For the past 4 years she has been a full-time principal. The school now has a roll of 233 students.

There is now a teaching staff of 10, 2 part-time teachers, and 3 teachers' aides. The school has an ESOL teacher and a reading recovery teacher. An additional part-time teacher's aide assists with Te Reo extension classes and Kapa Haka, and a part-time

Samoan teacher's aide teaches extension classes in Samoan and assists with the Samoan performance group.

We selected this school because it was recommended to us by a School Support adviser as a school that manages to operate effectively against the odds. The most recent ERO report noted that the school provided sound educational programmes, and a well-planned, taught, and evaluated curriculum. Particular features of the school commented upon by ERO were the high-quality relationships among students and between students and staff, and the high level of staff morale and commitment to the school. The review also noted that Māori students were achieving at levels comparable with other groups in most of the essential learning areas, although there was some disparity in English achievement for Māori boys. The school's data shows that just half the boys in Years 5–8 are reading at or above their chronological age.

In 2000, locally raised funds were $2,649, and $1,515 was raised in donations/school fees. Until the change in government policy, the school was bulk funded for teachers' salaries. This allowed the board to employ additional teachers, thereby reducing class sizes. "It's the people that were going to make the difference to the type of education our kids could get," commented the principal. Because of the school's low decile status, the removal of bulk funding has had little financial impact, and most of the initiatives that were begun under bulk funding have been retained. Given that fund-raising generates only $2,000-$3,000 annually in this community, the additional government funding is integral to school improvement efforts.

Recent accomplishments include remodelling much of the school and playground, creating an attractive and welcoming school environment. The administration area, which is yet to be remodelled, features pot plants, photographs of all of the students, and student art work . Pride of place is reserved for a display of the many trophies won by netball, league, basketball, and touch teams. There is a weekly display of the "Student of the Week". This is awarded for displaying the values considered important by the school. Five years ago a school library was built, but roll growth means that it is now needed as a classroom. A major attraction for students of all ages is a large and deep sand pit. Very recently a school hall has been added. The hall provides a valued community and school asset, allowing space for meetings and events. Staff are appreciative that the school does not "look like a decile 1 school any more".

While there tends to be quite a high turnover of teaching staff, the principal, deputy principal, and office manager have worked together productively for many years. The deputy principal is in her eleventh year at the school, and a senior teacher has also worked in the school for several years. Four teachers are in their first year of employment at this school. Despite these changes, the teachers we talked with considered that there was a common sense of purpose in the school. This they attributed to the values that have been built up by the principal, senior staff, and trustees, as well as constant collective revisiting of school goals, objectives, and expectations.

We interviewed the principal, the deputy principal, 3 classroom teachers, a teacher's aide, the board chair, the office manager, and 2 parents. This case study identifies several factors that contribute to the effectiveness of Totara School. They are:

- strong partnership between the principal and the chair of the board;
- commitment to students and to their learning;
- culture of caring;
- efforts to improve teaching.

Strong Partnership Between the Principal and Board of Trustees Chair

The board of trustees is capably led by one of the school's parents, who has five students currently attending the school. She has made a conscious choice to support this school, rather than one with a higher decile ranking. Her skills and dedication to her community have contributed much to the functioning of the board and to the partnership it has developed with the school. She recalls that when she first joined the board, it was made up of a group of interested parents, who functioned more like a PTA than a board. The principal carried the major share of responsibility for governance. "The principal was doing all the work. We were just endorsing." She says that she made a decision to look beyond her own school, to go to conferences to get an overview of what other boards were doing, and to complete a certificate in school trusteeship to further her knowledge and skills. She also sought to strengthen capability within the board. All the trustees have undertaken specific training to equip them for their governance roles, especially in the areas of their delegated responsibilities for specific portfolios, for one of the areas associated with the National Administration Guidelines (NAGS).

The school's 2000 ERO report indicated that standards of governance, management, and curriculum delivery were high quality. This reflects the strong partnership between the principal and the board chair.

Her daily presence in the school and her acceptance by staff ensure that she has a very comprehensive understanding of the issues faced by the school. She has been able to influence the composition of the board, and to advocate for its professional development, and that of teachers and support staff. For example, the office manager has been able to undertake a course in small business management, and she attends regular school office managers' network meetings. These skills have also enhanced the professionalism of school management.

The composition of the board now reflects the demographic character of the school community, with Māori, Samoan, and Sri Lankan representation. The board chair sees this as a real achievement, given that parents in this area do not readily volunteer for these roles. She believes that the school has been successful because of the strategies employed to attract parents to become involved. Trustees are highly visible in the school, performing roles that involve them in frequent interaction with students and parents, such as running the school lunch programme. "They know that you are a worker, not just taking up space," she commented.

She described ongoing efforts to encourage parents to become involved, in very small tasks initially, to develop their confidence, then "that way, when you come to shoulder tap them for elections, they know who you are and they're not intimidated". In her view, the fact that the board is not made up of busy professionals is an advantage, as it means the board has more time to spend in the school.

Because the principal and the board chair work closely together on a day-to-day basis, they share common understandings of the school and its challenges.

One of the things that is evident about this school is the quiet confidence that it is in tune with its community and, given the resources available, that it is offering the best education it can for its students. It makes continuing efforts to survey its parents, both formally and informally. While formal surveys do not attract a strong response rate, the information from these attempts, and from informal measures, indicates that parents are supportive of the school.

The principal explained that over time, the school has become clearer and more confident about its decisions in "what's most important for us and our students, not necessarily doing what others think that we should do".

In practice, this means that the school evaluates very carefully what it spends its time on. Unlike some other schools, it has not been caught up in "assessment frenzy". The school has enough data on student achievement to get a valid picture of student learning, but does not do more than is needed. For example, data is gathered on reading achievement for each year level, allowing trends over time to be analysed, and identifying areas where teaching efforts need to be targeted. The school does not use standardised tests such as the Progressive Achievement Tests, as it considers that more useful teaching information can be obtained using other tools, such as the Assessment Resource Banks. The board chair explained that the board has enough information about student learning.

> We get reports every meeting. We don't need to know how individuals are learning. But we need to know what and how is being delivered. How we are performing as a school.

The board sets the direction for strategic planning in careful partnership with the staff and the community. Policies are kept to a minimum, and they are reviewed on a 3-year cycle. There are good systems for communication flow between the board and staff. Teachers report frequently to the board on curriculum policies, teaching, and outcomes. Trustees consider that it is their responsibility to understand how well the school is meeting its objectives, and to allocate resources in ways that help the achievement of these objectives.

The board and the teachers appear to respect each other's roles in the school, and to understand that they have a shared responsibility for improving school effectiveness. Trustees are highly committed to building capability within both the board and the staff.

A Commitment to Students and to Their Community

> Our job is to provide hope and opportunity, not to judge. (principal)

While acknowledging the need for sound financial and property management, the principal emphasised that "the school is not a business. We offer leadership of service for students and families, that's what we are really here for." Students and families come first in this school. Decisions are made primarily on the basis of how they affect students. "If it isn't a good thing for our kids, we won't have it," asserted a senior teacher.

A strong theme in our discussions with staff was their acknowledgment that while many of their students faced difficult social circumstances, they could still learn, given the appropriate encouragement and support to do so. The principal reflected that she did not believe that many "people have any concept of the problems here for many of our kids, to even get themselves to school". As a consequence, significant numbers of students do not arrive at school in an emotional state that is conducive to learning. It is not sufficient in these circumstances to focus narrowly on academic achievement, she argued. Careful attention must also be paid to the emotional and motivational aspects of learning. All students are given the message that they can be successful learners. They are told: "You have ability. You can succeed. Go out there and do it and help others to come forwards" (board chair).

Teachers spoke of themselves as "cycle breakers", and as establishing a safe and predictable environment where students learned that they were valued, and where they were encouraged to "have a vision of something different, of greater possibilities".

Teachers emphasised the importance of caring for students, to ensure that they were supported emotionally. One teacher told us of the importance of patience and consistency:

> We get the best results when we are calm and patient, and at the same time we have to motivate, consistently. You're going to have to mark the homework, give the feedback. They know you'll listen, and that you'll be fair and act on that all of the time.

Four years ago, the school achievement data showed that despite the emphasis on learning, achievement levels were still below what the school aimed for. The principal and the teachers decided to track the progress of individuals across time. What emerged surprised the staff. More than half of the school roll had enrolled at the school after their first year at school. A number of students had attended several schools, often for very short periods of time. Analysis of the data on students who had been at the school since their school entry showed that their achievement in reading was appropriate for their age. Thus the impact of transience on aggregated school data was recognised for the first time.

Students who have changed schools, and sometimes their living arrangements, several times are a particular challenge for teachers. Although their teachers see the students as capable, they consider that they have to work hard to get students to see it for themselves. Each time these students move schools, they have to invest time and energy in establishing new relationships. The principal said that it was the job of the school to foster those relationships, and try to engender self-confidence in the students. If it turned out that the students moved on, she hoped that the experience at her school had given them some confidence to take with them. Two students who had previously attended other schools commented in the student survey that this school offered them more than they had experienced in their previous schooling:

> You get education and get more friends than that I had at my old school.

> I like this school more than my old school. I think this school is bester than the schools that I been to.

There is a considerable emphasis on sports in this school, which contributes to a feeling of self-confidence in the students, as they frequently perform well against other teams. Staff show an interest in teams' successes, and most staff attend finals. Sometimes parents are not able to attend, and staff reported that students expect their teachers to be there to support them.

A senior teacher told us of the constant challenge involved in keeping older students interested and of her efforts to "open up the world" for them. Consequently she spends a lot of time on current events, for example, using international events such as "the little Irish students trying to get to school". She also attempts to extend students' thinking by encouraging them to debate, to challenge, and to ask questions. While her goal is to encourage curiosity and intellectual challenge, she acknowledges that these goals are not those sought by many of the students' parents:

> Parents want the books to look neat and tidy, and the students to sit still and quiet, not to challenge.
>
> I want the kids to challenge me. I have to push them to talk back and to question. I want them to think, not for me to tell them something and have them believe.

In her view, all students, not just those from advantaged backgrounds, should have access to the kind of education that fosters higher order thinking and creativity. Her views are shared by other staff, who also share the strong belief in the need for high-quality education in lower decile schools. The school and trustees consider that for their students to be successful learners, families and the school must work together to lift expectations and levels of achievement.

The school has benefited from the Books in Homes programme, and all students are provided with several books of their own each year.

The school has various approaches to assist parents to support the learning of their students at home, and to help them to understand rationales behind current teaching methods. The board chair described some of the strategies the school has used to get parents to come into the school:

> We've held very successful curriculum evenings in maths and reading. We have to start with food. This helps to break down inhibitions our parents feel about being here. We then move into the classrooms to watch the students at work. Then we show them the sorts of things that can be done at home. We put reminders in the school newsletters.

The principal told us that one of the best forms of contacting the community is informal. Significant networking is done through sports teams. The two parents we interviewed confirmed the value of the parents' nights for them.

The parents also told us how much they looked forward to receiving the school newsletter each week. "It's got all the news. Who is the student of the week, whose birthday it is, public notices, what's going on, like if a teacher is getting married."

An ongoing initiative is a voluntary Homework Club, organised in response to requests from Sri Lankan parents. Students who choose to attend have homework specifically tailored to their learning needs, so that the time they spend is purposeful.

A Māori parent has begun a Māori support group. This provides an opportunity for Māori parents to meet together, discuss concerns or issues, and make recommendations to the board about better ways of doing things. For example, the group asked the teachers to ensure that curriculum planning addressed the achievement levels of a group of "at risk" Māori boys. The group also identified a group of Māori boys whom they considered would benefit from a programme to foster values and social skills. This group is run by a Māori Youth Pastor. In 2000, the school re-established links with the local marae.

The school is also working to develop the capacity of Pasifika parents to raise the achievement of their students. It has decided not to become involved at the present time in the Ministry of Education's Pasifika Literacy Initiative, the Home–School Partnership programme, because of staff involvement in other contracts. In a small school, there are not enough staff to allow take-up of all opportunities, however valuable they may be. The school's own programme has an emphasis on encouraging parents to share their knowledge and skills with their students, by using their own languages to encourage learning in the home. Parents are shown ways of encouraging their students to read for enjoyment, and how to use strategies such as pause, prompt, and praise to develop reading fluency.

Another programme that the school is trialling is a "Moving Kids" programme. This is a programme aimed at developing gross motor skills in students, with the goal of accelerating their learning. Some of the school's teachers' aides have been trained to work with students using the programme. Funds have been provided by the Heart Foundation to teach and evaluate the impact of this programme.

The school has a beneficial relationship with the local Rotary group, who act as mentors for the school, and contribute financially. A group of Rotary members visits the school regularly, and have been trained to help students by assisting with individual reading.

When asked the question "How do you know that you are making a difference to outcomes for students?", the principal pointed to the impact on the culture, climate, and expectations that have been developed in the school. She said that students who have remained with the school for several years have levels of achievement appropriate to their age.

The system of reporting to parents was changed after extensive consultation with parents. The information parents most desired was, "Where does my child stand in his/her age group?" Teachers report formally to parents twice a year. If parents do not attend, teachers visit them in their homes; however, virtually all parents attend. The parents we talked to spoke favourably about the "plain and simple reports that everyone can understand".

Staff want students to leave the school well equipped to succeed in secondary school. "We want them to go to high school feeling a confidence to fit in, to approach teachers with their needs."

The school has good links with its local secondary schools. Years 7 and 8 students develop familiarity with a local secondary school through their technology programme, which is taught there. Teachers spoke very positively of the efforts that local secondary schools make to help these students to succeed. One of the schools ensures that they are placed in classes with significant numbers of their classmates. Another has a smaller satellite campus of Years 9 and 10 students, which retains the "small school" environment that these students are used to.

Working in this school, while deeply satisfying professionally, is extremely demanding of staff. Several referred to the impact of their jobs on their personal lives. One teacher described the difficulty she found in achieving a balance between school demands, and the need for her to have her own time. A teacher's aide summed up the role of teachers in the following way:

> I see the extraordinary amount of extra work that teachers do. How keen they are to be adaptable to the students' needs. How open they are to trying new things. They go and watch the students' basketball games, art splash, dance splash. How they are aware of the students' home environment, not critical of it, but trying as much as possible with it. Everyone is treated as important here, all are important. It's a really nice place to be actually.

We have been left with the impression of a group of individuals who have chosen to work in a school which is both personally and professionally demanding, because of their belief in the importance of high-quality education for all students. While other teaching positions may be less demanding, they believe that their work is important, challenging, and rewarding.

Culture of Caring

The school has an explicit values statement with indicators showing how values should look and be reflected in practice, that is shared with all parents. "There's something about when you walk in here." The values are:

- fairness;
- academic growth;
- individuality;
- safety;
- community.

Several people talked to us about what they called the "atmosphere" of the school. Parents described it as "friendly and caring". They said that "kids always say 'Hi' to you. It makes you feel part of the school." They also told us, "It's well known that if you don't have a lunch the teachers will make you one."

There is a relaxed and informal tone in the school. Staff tend to dress more casually than in other schools, and one teacher made a point of telling us that expensive clothes can contribute to barriers between the school and the community. A teacher new to the school told us how he "relaxed right away. There were no boundaries to break. Everyone was co-operative."

The staff room is noticeably friendly and relaxed, with frequent banter and laughs. Students come in and out of the staff room, and are attended to in a friendly manner.

Teachers talked about common expectations for behaviour. Teachers are expected to be consistent in their expectations, which focus on polite and courteous ways of addressing others, fairness to others, and acceptance of difference. Students are expected to talk about their concerns, and to learn that they will always be listened to. Expectations for appropriate playground behaviour are high, and the use of trained peer mediators in the playground has helped students learn skills to allow them to find productive solutions to playground conflicts. Teachers also expect students to behave well in their communities, and will address any reports of misbehaviour that occur outside school hours.

A teacher told us that "Teachers don't just pay lip service. Teachers care for every child not just those from their own class." Teachers try to ensure that their students have access to the sorts of experiences that are taken for granted in other schools. One teacher told us that teachers frequently spend their own money to provide experiences for the students that they would otherwise miss out on. "I wouldn't want to add it all up," said one teacher, "it's pretty scary."

Staff also care for each other in a climate that appreciates and supports people's efforts. Mistakes are tolerated. "If we make mistakes we say so. We don't have to be always right," said one teacher. She also claimed that "It is nice to come to school even on days when you might be feeling a bit down," and that if there are any problems, teachers know that they will be helped and supported.

Opportunities are provided for leadership and growth. The senior team is alert to opportunities to mentor younger teachers, and to encourage them to undertake new roles and responsibilities, as well as professional development to enhance their knowledge and skills. One senior teacher pointed out that unless young teachers are encouraged to develop professionally they will "get bored and leave". A teacher in her third year was acting assistant principal at the time of our visit. She told us that she had not realised that she had the ability to do this role until she had the opportunity and support to do it.

Efforts to Improve Teaching

The major emphasis in the school is on enhancing the quality of everyday classroom practice. Ensuring that basic foundations are solid provides students with a platform on which to build subsequent learning. The school has employed highly accomplished consultants to work alongside teachers, in order to strengthen their teaching in ways that improve student learning outcomes.

Efforts began with attention to developing school-wide targets and plans, and to monitoring the school's progress towards achieving these. The school was fortunate in being able to have substantial professional development from a School Support literacy adviser. At the time, the staff were struggling with the new English curriculum, and they felt "bogged down" keeping on top of the implementation of new curriculum documents. The consultant began with a needs analysis in relation to the teaching of reading, and encouraged teachers to share what they felt positive about in relation to their teaching. They were encouraged to visit each other in their classrooms to share their practice, and the principal and adviser would teach their classes to allow this to happen. The adviser and the school were prepared to allow this phase to take time, so as to build up teachers' confidence in opening up their teaching to others, and to give them confidence in talking about the problems of practice.

After one term, the areas where teachers wanted specific development became clearer. Teachers were focusing their teaching and assessment on accuracy in reading, with limited attention to reading comprehension.

Regular staff meetings were held, and strategies for helping students to engage meaningfully with text were modelled and discussed. This was followed by regular meetings of the adviser and individual teachers, following classroom observations or collaborative classroom teaching with the adviser. The adviser also provided written feedback to each teacher.

Over time, each teacher and the adviser negotiated individual programmes of classroom assistance, which were targeted to the needs of each teacher and class. For example, a teacher might request that the adviser work with a group of students to demonstrate particular strategies. Release time was always available to allow for in-depth discussions.

Teachers reported that their teaching became more sensitive to the knowledge that each child brought to the text, and that they were more able to draw students' attention to aspects of reading which they needed to learn. This initiative is noteworthy in its careful match with the actual needs of the teachers, and the fact that it was carried out over a 2-year period, allowing time for consolidation and reflection.

Improvements in the intentionality of teaching had impacts on the quality of teacher planning and assessment. Teachers developed a greater knowledge of their students as learners, and became more skilled at incorporating objectives for specific students within their lessons. Teachers were encouraged to see assessment as part of learning and teaching, and as a mechanism to improve students' learning. There were improvements in students' reading as shown in the 6 year net, and in their attitudes to reading.

Teachers told us that the teacher capabilities developed in this programme became part of the intellectual capital of the school, and that they have been built on in subsequent teacher development.

More recently, the school gained funding from the Literacy Funding Pool to examine and improve its own practice in the teaching of written language. The school had already begun to collect samples of student writing across the school. As a staff, they worked at trying to decide on the curriculum levels of the samples, using the Assessment Resource Banks. An experienced consultant was employed to contribute to this exercise, and to ensure that there was consistency of interpretation across the school. He worked with the literacy team to help them give greater emphasis to the deeper features of writing, and to develop more specific skills and understandings that students should be able to demonstrate at each level. Benchmarks were established, and annotated to illustrate defining features. The students' achievement was then graphed in terms of curriculum levels, and achievement targets were set. The major goal was to lift the achievement levels of writing for a large "middle group" of students.

This was followed by 3 whole staff meetings focused on writing, examining areas such as "What makes kids good writers?", and setting benchmarks for an effective classroom writing programme. A major focus was on modelling the writing process, and on ways of giving feedback to students on their writing. The consultant also shared ways of motivating students to write, while developing teacher understandings of the writing process.

After the staff meetings, teachers were observed during 3 one-hour literacy teaching lessons. The observation focus was on teacher modelling of writing, and on the feedback that teachers were providing to students on their own writing. Following the observation, the consultant and teacher were able to talk together, and specific feedback was given to the teacher on their effectiveness. Goals were set for the next observation, and there was also an opportunity for the consultant to respond to individual teacher queries. This included strategies for organising the classroom so that "space" was created for the provision of focused, sustained feedback to each student at least once a week, ways of recording feedback, and processes for sharing goals with students.

After each series of observations, the consultant met with all staff to give teachers general feedback on the school's strengths and challenges in the teaching of writing.

The teachers we spoke to were enthusiastic about the professional development. The deputy principal identified writing as the most successful aspect of the school's literacy programme. She said that teachers were motivated and positive about trying out new ideas, and there was now a greater awareness of the elements of effective writing, as well as increased teacher skill in assisting students to become better writers. At the time of our visit, formal data on the impact of the professional development on students' writing was not available, although teachers considered that students were showing improvement.

This initiative raised awareness in teachers of the need for them to use some of the principles they had learnt in their teaching of reading. It highlighted for one teacher the importance of using running records diagnostically in teaching students, rather than simply using them to determine reading ages. This professional development has therefore contributed to teacher understanding of the distinction between assessment *of* learning (for school accountability and to inform future teaching), and assessment *for* learning. The next focus for professional development will be on the teaching of reading, using the same consultant.

Students' Views of their Experiences at School

Year 8 Students

All Year 8 students (22) except one considered that they usually had good friends, and 18 reported that they never/hardly ever feel lonely. Most (19) considered that teachers usually helped them to improve their work. The majority of students (19) considered that they usually feel safe in the playground, although 2 students reported that they never/hardly ever felt safe, and 4 felt that they were bullied sometimes. Students (18) reported that they enjoy themselves at school, and that their teacher tells them when they do good work (17). Schoolwork does not come easily to many of these students, with only 7 reporting that they usually learnt most things pretty quickly. Despite this, only one child reported that he/she usually got tired of trying, and 8 indicated that they never/hardly ever got tired of trying. However, only 3 of those who reported that they found learning easy indicated that they never/hardly ever got tired of trying.

Students also identified what they liked best about the school, and what they would like to change. In contrast to students at most other schools in this study, this group of students wrote extensively about their views of the school. We have reproduced one student's response in full, as it provides an unusually comprehensive view of school from the perspective of a young student.

What Things Do You Like Best About Your School?

> I like the way our school has a lot of different opportunities for everyone and people have the chance to develop their talents. Like we have cultural groups for students to be involved in and kapa haka. Also we have a good sporting school and everyone has the chance to get involved in sports outside the school. There is a lot of friendly people at our school and it's easy to make friends.
>
> Another good thing about our school is that our principal is not like a scary headmaster that people are scared of.
>
> People know that when they have a problem anywhere they can talk to her.
>
> We also have peer mediators out in the playground to help kids who are upset or have a problem and they work to make our school a better place to be.
>
> We have a lot of room for everyone to play in and stuff.
>
> Our school looks after everyone and everyone has an opportunity to speak up and be proud.
>
> We have computers to use for our projects.
>
> We have a cool playground and its safe too.
>
> Our classrooms have lots of things for us to use.
>
> I feel safe here at Totara.
>
> I think Totara School is a cool place to be.

What Things Would You Like to Change About Your School?

> Well I think that we could play tackle rugby 'cos a lot of our seniors want to play and hardly anyone gets hurt when we play anyway.
>
> Better courts and hoops for basketball and netball. And we need more trees to climb because they were cut down when we made our prefabs.

Themes which emerged from students' written comments about this school were enjoyment of sporting opportunities, particularly playing against other schools and being successful, pride in the school, and appreciation of teachers and relationships within the school.

There were 15 references to sport and games, highlighting the importance of physical play for this age group. There were 12 references to teachers who were described as "fair", "kind", and "helpful", and willing to go out of their way to help students, as illustrated by this comment:

> Good teachers. You don't have to be ashamed of who you are. If you can't work it out the teacher is always there to help you. If you can't get to a netball game or something like that the teachers always ask if you want them to take you.

There were also 8 comments referring to relationships, reflected in statements such as:

> People care about each other.
>
> Friends and teachers make me feel I'm safe.
>
> Friends I can always trust.

Also evident was a strong pride in the school. Students wrote:

> Sometimes I like watching kids play on the playground. It makes me feel proud of this school.
>
> Our school caters for anybody's need.
>
> I think this school is the best in New Zealand.

Students appreciate what this school does for them:

> The teachers and the principal because they teach just about everything that I need to learn.
>
> I like the way this school has different opportunities for the kids to develop their talents.

There were just two references to specific curriculum areas (art, and physical education), although several identified education or learning in general. One student wrote:

> The other thing I like the best is writing about arguments, it really good to write arguments, because when you get to collage you just no how to write argument and learn about.

In response to the question about what they would like to change about their school, 13 students wanted to be able to play rugby, frequently identified as "tackle rugby". Teachers told us that this was a safety issue, as some students were large, and there was a risk that smaller students could be injured. Nine students considered that the rules should be changed to allow sweets and/or "fizzy drinks" to be consumed at school, so what students claim to want may not necessarily be in their best interests.

Year 4 Students

The 20 Year 4 students surveyed were most positive about a set of items related to their sense of belonging in the school, and teachers' kind and fair practices. There were variable responses to items about student behaviour and students' liking for the school.

The things Year 4 students liked best about the school were the kindness of peers and teachers (8 responses), and enjoying their friends (9 responses).

Students in this school stated that they help each other when they get hurt, look out for each other, and encourage others to join in games, while teachers "take notice of other people" and are "nice and kind". Students enjoy opportunities to play games in the playgrounds with their friends (8 comments).

There was little reference to school work, with maths, language, and story each receiving one mention. One child liked school best "when I be good and doing hepes of work".

Suggested changes referred mostly to enhancing the playground by including a swimming pool (2), and by having more things to play with. Three students thought that the school would be better if it were bigger, and one wanted "more people".

Teachers' Views

Profile of Teachers Who Completed Surveys

Sex	Female	7
	Male	2
Position	Classroom teacher	5
	Part-time teacher	2
	Specialist teacher	
	AD/DP	2
Years of teaching experience	Less than 2	4
	2–4 years	1
	5–10 years	1
	11–20 years	3
	21 plus years	
Years at Totara School	Less than 2	7
	2–4 years	1
	5–10 years	1
	11–20 years	
	21 plus years	
Qualifications	Diploma of Teaching (7), Bachelor of Education (3), Certificate of teaching, BA and LTCL, BSc, "Degree in Teaching"	
Membership of professional organisations	NZEI (5), 1 Registered Music Teachers	

Teachers' Views of Current Issues and Achievements

Teachers are very positive about the school. All teachers considered that students were encouraged to try their best, that students were respected, and that teachers had strong beliefs that all students could learn. They thought that the school has clear and challenging expectations for learning, that these are collectively shared, and that teachers monitor students' progress towards their achievement of goals. They also felt that students are given frequent feedback to assist them with their learning. They saw themselves as having student learning at the forefront of their goals.

Teachers are supportive of the management practices and culture of the school. They felt they have a voice in the strategic planning process, participate in important decision-making, and consider that the decision-making processes are fair. With one exception, they all thought that the board of trustees plays a significant role in supporting school developments.

Staff regularly discuss how to achieve school goals and targets, and senior staff communicate a clear vision of where the school is going, and are available to discuss curriculum and learning.

Overall, the picture of a strongly unified teaching staff emerges. This is a considerable achievement, given that half of the teachers have been in the school for only one year.

Most teachers selected "don't know" in response to questions about their views of change over the past 3–4 years, and 7 of the 9 staff who completed questionnaires were not able to identify achievements in the last 3–4 years, as they had not been in the school that long. Four teachers were in their first year of teaching at the school.

Strengths of the school were identified as leadership and management (4 comments) and the supportive relationship between colleagues (5 comments). Comments such as: "Very good management. Staff get on well together, and enjoy their jobs. Management involve staff and treat them well" and "strong and fair leadership", "valuing each other, acceptance" and "mutual respect" indicate the positive nature of relationships within the school. Two staff identified staff commitment to students as a current strength of the school.

The changes that teachers would like mostly referred to social issues. For example, one teacher wrote about concerns about students arriving at school at 7.30 am, another to the need to have access to a social worker on site, and a third to the challenge of achieving greater involvement of the community in the day-to-day running of the school.

One of the two support staff who completed the questionnaire[11] also identified the need to "foster parents' confidence so that they can come in and see what a great place this is".

Summary

This case study presents a picture of a small, low decile school that, over a 7-year period with a committed principal, has progressively reversed its previous negative reputation. The turn-around has come about largely because of school leadership, which is uncompromising in its mission to ensure that the students it serves receive the best educational opportunities possible. The principal, staff, and board are all united in their efforts to create a school where students are valued and supported, and taught well. All who contribute to this endeavour want the best for the students, and seek to enhance their own knowledge and skills so that they are able to lift academic and learning outcomes.

They work well with each other, and enlist the support of resources in and outside the school to strengthen their own capabilities and those of the school parents. There are lessons to be learned from the professional development experiences of this school. The initiatives that appear to have offered the most are those which have had clear negotiated outcomes, and which have focused attention on actual classroom practice. When teachers are given direct, focused, and informal feedback in a supportive climate about their actual teaching, as opposed to receiving information about teaching, the likelihood that they will be able to improve their practice is significantly increased. Professional development also took place over a time span that was sufficient for teachers to develop confidence in having others observe and comment on their teaching, and to allow time for real change to occur. When initiatives are rushed, significant learning can be sacrificed in the urgency to "cover" content.

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[11] Only two support staff completed the survey, so their responses have not been tabulated.

In a small school such as Totara, demands are concentrated on comparatively few individuals. This can be quite a burden for teachers, and appears to take a personal toll.

Table 34

Year 8 Students' Views of Their Experience at School (n=23)

School is a place where	Mostly	Sometimes	Never/hardly ever	No response
I have good friends	22		1	
Teachers help me to improve my work	19	4		
I feel safe in the playground	19	2	2	
I enjoy myself	18	5		
My teacher tells me when I do good work	17	5	1	
Teachers listen to what I say	16	7		
I get all the help I need	16	7		
I can learn what I need for the future	15	7		1
I like my teachers	15	8		
Teachers explain things clearly to me	15	8		
I could do better work if I tried	14	9		
I do interesting things	11	12		
Teachers treat me fairly	11	10	1	1
The rules are fair	11	10	2	
I keep out of trouble	7	13	3	
I learn most things pretty quickly	7	16		
Students behave well in class	4	19		
I feel restless	4	13	6	
I get bored	2	14	6	1
I feel lonely	1	4	18	
I get tired of trying	1	14	8	
I get upset		14	9	
I get a hard time		12	11	
I get bullied		4	19	

Table 35

Year 4 Students' Views of Their Experience at School (n=20)

School is a place where	Mostly	Sometimes	Never/hardly ever
My teacher is kind to me	17	2	1
My teacher is fair to me	16	4	
I belong in this school	16	3	1
I like my work	15	5	
My teacher helps me do better work	15	4	1
I try hard at school	15	5	
I feel safe in the playground	15	5	
My teacher tells me when I do good work	13	7	
I like my school	11	7	2
Students in my class behave well	4	14	2

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Table 36

Teachers' Views of Their School (n=9)

The school now	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	No response
Staff encourage students to try their best	9				
There is mutual respect between staff and senior staff in this school	8	1			
Teachers in this school believe that all students can learn	8	1			
Teachers respect students	7	2			
Teachers like working in the school	7	2			
Staff have a commitment to the whole school and not just their class or syndicate	7	2			
Teachers have a say in the school strategic plan	7	1			1
Student success is regularly celebrated in this school	7	2			
Extra-curricular activities provide valuable opportunities for all students	7	2			
Teachers regularly discuss ways of improving students' learning	6	2			1
Teachers in this school believe that all students can be successful	6	3			
Adults (teachers) as well as students learn in this school	6	3			
Disruption in classes is dealt with promptly so that learning for all students can proceed	6	2			1
Students are clear about standards of behaviour expected in the school	6	2			1
The board of trustees plays a significant role in supporting developments within the school	6	2	1		
Decision-making processes are fair	5	3			1
The school allows staff joint planning time	5	2	1		
Staff ensure that students receive constructive feedback about their work	5	3			
New staff are well supported in this school	5	3	1		
Teachers regularly monitor the learning and progress of individual children	5	3			
There is effective communication between senior staff and teachers	5	2	2		
Parents are clear about behaviour standards expected in school	5	4			
If staff have a problem with their teaching they usually turn to colleagues for help	5	3			
Non-teaching staff feel involved in the life of the school	5	4			
There is regular staff discussion about how to achieve school goals and targets	5	3			
Senior staff openly recognise teachers when they do things well	5	2	1		
Students' work is prominently displayed	5	3	1		
Teachers encourage students to be independent learners	4	4			
Staff in this school work hard to promote and maintain good relations with the community	4	4	1		
Senior staff are available to discuss curriculum/teaching matters	4	5			
Whole school meetings are worthwhile	4	4	1		
Staff feel encouraged to bring forward new ideas	4	4			1
Teachers regularly collaborate to plan their teaching	4	4			1
Staff participate in important decision making	4	4			1
Staff development time is used effectively in the school	4	4			1
At staff meetings time is spent on important things rather than on minor issues	4	4			1
Standards set for students are consistently upheld across the school	4	5			
Students respect teachers	3	6			
The primary concern of everyone in the school is student learning	3	6			
The senior staff communicate a clear vision of where the school is going	3	5			1
Teachers share similar beliefs and attitudes about effective teaching/learning	3	5			1

The school now	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	No response
The staff encourage parents to be involved in the school	3	5			1
There is effective communication among teachers	2	6	1		
Expectations about school work are communicated clearly to all students	2	6			1
Teachers have a say in topics selected for the school's staff development programme	2	4	2		1
Every attempt is made to set challenging standards of achievement for each student	2	6			1
Students in this school are enthusiastic about learning	2	6	1		
Teachers pay attention to keeping the school environment attractive	2	5	2		
The school communicates clearly to parents the standard of work it expects from students	1	4	3		1
Non-teaching staff have input into the school strategic plan	1	3	4		1
The school development plan includes practical ways of evaluating success in achieving goals and targets	1	5	2		1
Teachers regularly observe each other in the classroom and give each other feedback		3	5		1
Students have some say in the school strategic plan	1		5	2	1

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PHOENIX SCHOOL

Introduction

Phoenix School Profile

School type	Full primary	
Roll size	225	
Decile rating	5	
Student ethnicity	Pākehā	– 66%
	Māori	– 30%
	Pasifika	– 2%
	Other	– 2%
Staffing entitlement	9.8	
Actual staffing	9 full-time, 2 part-time, 1 reading recovery teacher, 0.6 teacher of reading	
Recommended	By a principal and an adviser as a school that had been the subject of an ERO discretionary review and is improving.	

Phoenix School is a full primary school situated in a suburban community. The school has been part of the community for 112 years, and some of the original building still remains, although it has been altered over the years. A new classroom block and administration building have been built in the last 5 years.

The grounds are attractive, with a newly constructed adventure playground, sand pit, and petanque court. There is a generous playing field, and a sloping incline with several old established trees. Next to this is an out-of-bounds bank, which has been declared unsafe. Gardens are well maintained, and baskets filled with flowers hang from the verandahs outside classrooms. A new sign, "Phoenix School: learners today, leaders tomorrow", greets visitors. The administration building is a brightly coloured modern building with a cheerful well-lit foyer, which is filled with children's art work, photographs, and a display featuring the "student of the week". The school appears well cared for and inviting.

The positive environment belies the turmoil and tension which overtook the school between 1995 and 1999. An ERO accountability review in March 1999 highlighted significant areas of concern in relation to the governance and management of the school, and its ability to sustain the delivery of a high-quality education.

The ERO review reported tensions among the school community, a strained relationship between the board and the then principal, dissatisfaction from some staff and parents about the ways in which concerns were handled by the then principal, and a climate that was having a negative impact on all parties. It also reported insufficient documentation in some curriculum areas to provide assurance of balanced curriculum coverage, the need to monitor and assess student progress against the achievement objectives from the national curriculum, and the need to improve the performance management system.

On the positive side, the ERO review stated that positive teaching practices could be found throughout the school and students were engaged in purposeful learning activities. It noted the staff training focus on co-operative learning and its use throughout the school, and good whole class, group, and individual teaching practices. An anti-bullying programme had been adopted, but ERO suggested policies and documentation should be reviewed to identify a set of clear guidelines for classroom and playground management.

The then principal took stress leave at the time of the ERO review in April 1999, and then resigned. His job was taken by the deputy principal, who became acting principal, and was subsequently permanently appointed in 2000.

At the time of the poor ERO review, bad media coverage occurred in local and national newspapers. One media report stated that the school was "in crisis", the roll was continuing "to dive", staff turnover was high, and teaching standards were "in danger of dropping following tension and strained relationships between the school community and the principal". According to another media report, "the staff at the school at any one time was 13, but in the previous four years there had been 15 resignations".

Roll numbers diminished from 308 in March 1994 to 163 in July 2000. By December 2001, numbers had increased to 244.

Decreases in enrolments between 1998 and 2000 seemed to be mainly due to parents taking their children away, or enrolling them at other schools. However, the school serves a limited catchment area, and demographic information shows that the number of primary school aged children in the area is decreasing. The school is bounded by state highway 1 and the railway line on one side, and land zoned rural on other sides, so there is little new housing being built.

For about a year from August 1999, the Ministry of Education School Support Services were involved with the school, which was categorised as a school "at risk".

This school was recommended by a principal and an adviser, as a school that had been the subject of an ERO discretionary review and was now improving. The school was involved with the Literacy Enhancement Project in 2001 and 2002.

The roll-generated staffing of 9.8 in 2001 included 0.2 ORRS and 0.7 management staffing.

The school asks for $50 per student, or $80 per family, in donations (2001 figures). Activity fees are charged for each activity. These occur approximately twice a term, and cost from $3 to $7 per activity. In 2000, the school raised $17,373 in local funds from the parents' support group, donations, and sponsors. There was a surplus of $135 from trading (school lunches and stationery), and of $4,413 from activities. Sundry income was $5,000. Total income from local sources was $26,921.

The school received $25,486 when bulk funding was abolished and redistributed to schools in 2000, and this was used to employ a teacher aide to run a special needs literacy programme, overseen by a teacher. The principal said that this had had huge benefits for children with special needs, of which the school had a large proportion. She commented that the school also had a large proportion of special abilities students, with comparatively few "average ability" students.

The principal identified a "constant battle with funding" as a challenge for the school. Only 30 percent of families pay their voluntary donations, and the school needs to go to outside agencies for funding. The principal felt strongly that the school needs a social worker, and believes this should be paid for by the government. The school was eligible for a social worker under the "social worker in schools" scheme, but missed out on being allocated one. The allocation went to a group of other schools in the region. However, it had been successful in gaining funding for a social worker from The Safer Community Council.

We interviewed the principal, board of trustees chair, the deputy principal, who was also the literacy leader, the caretaker, who was the staff representative on the board of trustees, a provisionally registered teacher, who was the science curriculum leader, the assistant principal, who was the arts curriculum leader, a teacher aide, 2 teachers, and the office manager. We also interviewed a group of 13 parents.

Consistent themes were:

- the positive changes engendered by the appointment of a new principal, and formation of a strong management and staff team;
- substantive work in developing systems, documentation, and policies to address the ERO review concerns;
- improvements to the public image of the school, through "good news stories" and marketing;
- steady development in enhancing relationships with families;
- consolidation of work with students on student-led conferences, the development of a behaviour management system, updating staff skills and knowledge, and developing consistent planning in curriculum areas and assessment.

This was a school that had worked systematically and tenaciously to overcome low morale, poor publicity, and relationship difficulties under the leadership of a previous principal. The new principal made use of ERO's reviews to justify and point the direction for the establishment of new systems and processes, and a coherent and rigorous approach to teaching and learning. Within a year, the school had shifted from being categorised as "at risk" to a school that was noted in its community for its high standards of student behaviour and achievement.

Appointment of New Principal and Formation of a Strong Management and Staff Team

Those participants who had been at the school from 1997 to 1999 talked about the time under the previous principal as being extremely difficult and stressful. They highlighted discordant relationships between principal and staff, and principal and parents, bullying by the principal himself, and a climate of negativity.

> He wasn't the right person for the job. It was stressful. He didn't pass the mail on to the teachers. . . . I thought about leaving. (office manager)

> The only time the principal saw parents was when he bollocked them. (caretaker)

Three board chairpersons and many staff members left during the previous principal's regime.

When the current principal began as acting principal in 1999, she took immediate steps to restore a positive school climate. One of the first tasks was to dispel the internal discord and "in-fighting" within the board, which made it difficult for the school to move forward. There was some discussion of the need for a Commissioner to govern the school. The acting principal sought external advice, and the New Zealand School Trustees Association suggested that the school co-opt an experienced chair of another local school board to assist with school governance. This happened, and the person continues to be a co-opted member of the board, and its joint chair.

Productive relationships had to be built within the board. The co-opted board chair described herself as bringing the right mix of skills to the position. She had strong ideas about her responsibility to work with the principal, make sure the board understood its roles and responsibilities and the difference between management and governance, and for board members to be trained if necessary. Her first job was to clarify the role of the board with members:

> I have a fairly good understanding of how the education system works. The board needed someone who understood the difference between governance and management. I can say "It's nothing to do with us" when board members cross the line.

In her view, this clarification was useful, because previously "people had been meddling in the day-to-day management of the school. . . . A board member would go into a classroom and rip a teacher to bits."

In April and July 1999, the school was identified as having surplus staffing. The board was therefore obliged to redeploy teachers, a process that was unsettling for staff. According to the principal, redeployment was difficult, but people worked to support each other, and were helped by the union (NZEI Te Riu Roa). A positive side to the exercise from the principal's perspective was the opportunity it provided for staff to think about where they wanted to teach, and move to teach different class levels if they wished.

Another immediate challenge was to prevent the roll from dropping so low that the school closed. "People were fleeing from the school." The parents whom we interviewed told us of conflict between the group of parents who were withdrawing their children from the school, and those who were staying. One parent reported that another parent said to her, "If you're not going to go, you are going to suffer." Her response was "My children are being taught well. Why should I move them?" As it was, three "surplus" classrooms were removed from the site in January 2000 during term break. This was seen as a public message of families' disenchantment with the school.

The school managed to reverse its roll decline in mid 2000, and has since gradually built its roll back to higher numbers than they were before the negative 1999 ERO report.

The board chair saw her role as "getting stability at the top". When the principal resigned at the end of 1999, the board appointed the acting principal as principal. This action was not without contention. Some saw the new principal as "an outsider". She had come from the UK 3 years before to an acting senior teacher position in New Zealand. Furthermore, she was a woman, the first female school principal the school had had in 111 years.

More board members resigned, and at the beginning of 2000, a by-election was held. After this, the whole board was new, except for 2 members.

A new deputy principal was appointed at the beginning of 2000.

The principal realised that she needed to ensure that all staff were "on board". The principal, senior management team, and board set about building a sense of team, engendered by open and friendly communication, staff involvement in developing systems, professional support, and acknowledgment of work.

> The way the teachers see the support staff has changed. They are members of staff. It is very important that we act as a staff. Before, as a teacher, I didn't realise how significant the office manager and the caretaker are to the principal. We all pulled together against the outside influences. (principal)
>
> [The principal's] style is open. (office manager)
>
> As a board, we send thank you letters in recognition of some things staff have done. (board chair)
>
> The staff really gel together nicely now. We are on the same level. The principal is open and approachable. (teacher)

There was a huge whole school effort required to reverse the negative trends in the school:

> If I didn't try to lead through problems, we were going to lose the school. The only way forward was to build a strength from within. It was a drain on my energy, I was working long hours, but so was everyone else. (principal)
>
> We are all in the same canoe paddling in the same direction. (deputy principal)

The principal and deputy principal led a school-wide consistent approach to ensuring curriculum coverage, monitoring and assessing student performance, and programme planning. These areas had all been singled out in the ERO review as requiring attention. Alongside this focus, the school provided new opportunities for staff professional development, and over two and a half years, offered professional development in 9 different areas.

The school did not work alone on its problems. Outside help was called in. "You can't just be an isolated island." The College of Education's "Human Resources in Schools" team were "brilliant", according to the principal. She also said that the Ministry of Education supported the school in finding a new financial service provider. This provider found free sources of professional development. Principal colleagues in the cluster group of local principals were of considerable assistance. "They involved me in peer appraisal. They gave me good insight into what was available." However, help was not always available when it was needed. The school was "very much alone" and without Ministry of Education guidance from March to July 1999. The principal said she has had an education consultant acting as her outside appraiser in the last 2 years. "That has been good for me, but I didn't have him in 1999, when I was struggling with a dysfunctional school." The deputy principal and principal went on a course on "Marketing your school" and used some of the ideas to promote the school.

Developing Systems, Documentation, and Policies to Address ERO Concerns

In response to ERO concerns and compliance requirements, an action-based management plan, planning and performance management systems, and school policies were developed and implemented during 1999.

- The acting principal developed the 1999 Annual Management Plan from the areas of concern highlighted in the ERO review. It had a clear action plan where objectives were specific, and strategies were largely of action to be carried out. The acting principal said she made use of the ERO report as the "first plan", and that she was glad of this, because there could be no question about what needed to be done. It was an "outside person's" view.
- The school developed whole school planning processes and templates, systems, and documentation in relation to curriculum, and put these into practice.
- Human Resources in Schools helped the school develop a performance management system. Staff were involved in developing indicators for the professional standards, and links were made with professional development. Job descriptions for support staff were revised to better reflect their responsibilities.
- The acting principal and board chair worked together over the summer term break to review policies.

Everyone understood and supported the new formats:

> There was no question that everyone was pulling the same way. This had a knock-on effect in everybody having a familiarity with the documents. (principal)

The strategic plan was developed in 2000, in full consultation with all parties. It emphasised the development of whole school approaches to planning, assessment, and teacher professional development. It made action plans for the board's self-review process, and for updating and reviewing the school charter and prospectus. The appraisal system and strategies for acknowledging and valuing the contributions of staff, board, and parents were part of personnel objectives. The strategic plan also highlighted a review of consultation processes and ways to communicate positively with parents. There was an emphasis on action to achieve good publicity. These included, "To continually seek ways of positively advertising new initiatives in the school" and "To continually seek ways of ensuring regular school promotion in the community newspaper". Thus the strategic plan set a programme to counter the negative image and poor working relationships between parents and staff.

Following the appointment of the deputy principal, work began on curriculum objectives. Syndicates were re-organised so that there was better integration across the school, instead of each syndicate operating individually. All the staff came in at the weekend to work together on shifting curriculum resources to central points, so that they could be shared.

The deputy principal was provided with release time to give her time for oversight of planning.

The teaching staff had had support from the Specialist Education Services BEST team to establish a behaviour management system in the school. Early in 2000, the newly appointed deputy principal brought knowledge and experience of a new behaviour management plan. This new plan was implemented, and its value in improving behaviour was mentioned by all those whom we interviewed. Previously staff and parents believed that there were not clear expectations for children's behaviour, or consequences for behaviour. The community believed that there was unaddressed bullying in the playground. "This belief has swung 180 degrees with the complete turn-around in behaviour." (principal)

The confirmed ERO discretionary review report in March 2000 found that "the board had addressed the actions from the previous report".

Processes and systems were refined and extended during 2000 and 2001.

Improving the School's Public Image

A great deal of pride is taken in making the school grounds and gardens attractive. The school's behaviour management has also improved the extent to which rubbish is dropped, as students are required to think about the consequences of what they do, and to take responsibility. Recently the school built a petanque piste—a first for a primary school in New Zealand. This achievement was highlighted in the local paper. There is a new logo and sign board at the school's entrance.

A new administration block was built in 1998, with the building project being managed by the then board chair. In November 1999, further positive publicity was gained for the school when the block was formally opened by an All Black. The administration block provides an attractive reception and staff area, and better working spaces for the principal and office staff. "I was working in a cupboard before." (office manager)

The deputy principal and principal used some of the ideas from their course on "Marketing your school" to promote the school. They made efforts to build links with the local media and highlight "good news" stories about the school. Achievements for the school, students, and staff are regularly reported in the local paper. Within weeks of being appointed, there were newspaper reports highlighting the efforts being made by the acting principal to tackle issues at the school, stating that "Primary school has turned the corner" and the acting principal has "taken the bull by the horns". Positive media coverage has continued. For example, in 2000, the local newspaper published a feature page supported by local businesses about the school's achievements (including its excellent ERO review, sports programme, staff and parent unity, and te reo Māori and culture classes). In 2001, the newspaper published a photo and story of the school caretaker on a special "caretaker day" arranged to acknowledge his work. The principal said that the school celebrates academic, behavioural, and sporting achievement. Students are acknowledged for their individual abilities as well as for team efforts.

> When the children achieve it's in the paper. The sporting cups are all very well, but it's the academic achievement that they (parents) want to see. (chair)
>
> We have to sell ourselves. (caretaker)

The school has targeted influential people in the community, including representatives from the district council, police, and Barnardos, to talk about changes to the school.

Enhancing Relationships with Families

The school has encouraged a culture of open communication and friendliness. A number of participants commented on the importance of the school receptionist, as the first person whom many visitors contact, and her friendly manner.

A number of processes were instituted to open the school to parents, including:

- regular family evenings to talk about general issues;
- an open invitation for parents to come to assembly;
- community morning teas once a month, for which staff cater;
- enrolment being done by the principal, so that she got to know parents and children;
- the principal being on "gate duty" every day;
- a regular open day at the school, providing a programme for preschool-aged children, their parents, and their grandparents, an invitation to attend assembly, and a new prospectus pack outlining the school's achievements as well as information.

The principal thought that having a good complaints and concerns procedure is another feature of their open approach.

Parents whom we interviewed appreciated the openness:

> If a parent has an issue that they want to discuss, e.g., religious instruction, they don't sit back and wait. The principal is always approachable and always at the school. (parent)

There is a willingness to actively find out the views of parents.

> STA helped us in how to do a good strategic plan survey. We wrote up the results of parental and community surveys and parents and students put stickers on their top 10 priorities. (principal)

A system of student-led conferences, developed under the previous principal, has been continued and extended. The process involves students being part of the reporting process with parents and teacher, and is aimed at encouraging students to monitor their own learning, and be active participants in setting goals and expectations. The role of parents is seen as one of support. The procedure is explained to parents in a newsletter, and they are asked to prepare for it and contribute to topic discussions. Students prepare a sheet highlighting their strengths and areas needing improvement. Conferences are 15 minutes each, beginning with a presentation by the student and then discussion. Goals are set and a written summary sent home. Each participant evaluates the conference. In addition, parents are told they can set another interview time if they like. There is a creche operated by Girl Guide rangers at the same time as student-led conferences, so that the whole family can come to the meeting, and the session with teacher, parents, and child can be held without the distraction of younger family members. In 2001, the school had a record attendance at conferences of 93 percent of all families. As well as encouraging students to be active in analysing their own learning, there are advantages in the clarity that this system brings for all participants.

> Students do not often have the opportunity to have both the parent and teacher listening. They talk and come to agreement. There's no secret because you're all together. (principal)

Parents whom we interviewed said they felt well-informed about children's behaviour and overall learning. Parents of younger children said they were provided with SEA test results, but "not in a competitive way", and given a "home book" with suggestions on what the parents could do to support learning. Some parents thought this system should be extended to older students. They said they appreciated being asked their opinions through surveys. One parent highlighted the excellent feedback he had received from a teacher about his son's temper tantrums. Together the parent and teacher worked out that the son had a food allergy.

Parents were asked what they liked about the school. They commented on:

- the "brilliant expectations" for behaviour that were relayed to everyone involved with the school, and how much they liked the positive focus on rewards for good behaviour—"It makes a difference. It motivates children";
- how hard teachers work;
- the "friendly well-behaved kids who are excited to go";

- that teachers are approachable;
- relationships between all staff and students—"These adults believe in children and children know this. There is no talking down";
- trust in students;
- "the welcoming in the school";
- the ability of parents to approach the school about concerns and have these addressed;
- the "chatty and informative" newsletters.

These responses highlight the degree to which this school has worked to turn around a climate of distrust and negativity to one of openness.

Working with Students

The school philosophy is:

> To collectively create a challenging and exciting learning environment aimed at developing independent and cooperative well-educated students who have respect for the beliefs and attitudes of others.

The principal described the culture of the school as "open, friendly, and family orientated". As an example, the school investigates and analyses absences to ascertain reasons, and to assist families where it can. If children are absent, parents are telephoned to check that everything is all right. If a parent does not have a phone, someone from the school goes to the home to investigate if there is a second day of absence. As a consequence, the school does not have a truancy problem. The school noticed that some students were routinely absent on a Monday because they did not have food for lunch, and now provides bread and fillings for students who need this.

The school has moved its emphasis from being "a co-operative learning school" to a school that encompasses broader approaches to teaching and learning. In the year from 1999 to 2000, the school addressed all the substantive concerns raised by ERO in relation to curriculum coverage, assessment and planning, and identification of barriers to learning. This was achieved through planning and staff development in the arts, literacy, numeracy, te reo Māori, social studies, technology, PE, and health curriculum areas, as well as performance management and ICT. As in other case study schools, science was not a high priority.

From 2000, staff development has been in physical education and health, the arts, literacy, te reo Māori, and 3D Achieve.

In 2001, the school has undertaken in-depth work on literacy, ICT, and special needs. The principal said that the school's professional development priorities have firstly been identified from new government initiatives and curriculum developments. Staff needs are asked about, and if there is common ground, these areas are singled out. All staff are supported through professional development, not just teachers.

When we carried out our interviews, the school was part-way through the Ministry of Education's Literacy Leadership Programme, and was finding this to be useful. The steps it had taken were described by the literacy leader:

- Teachers considered the question, "What is a literacy vision?" and agreed on the statement, "to provide a positive environment to motivate students to achieve in literacy".
- Teachers participated in an analysis of data and a review of literacy. They identified literacy needs within the school, and in doing this exercise came to realise that the school was "not enhancing all the thinking skills of the students. We were doing knowledge and recall and that sort of thing but . . . there was not a lot of interaction or questioning of what students thought." Thinking skills became an agreed school-wide focus.
- An action plan was developed on how to effectively use running records to enhance thinking skills.
- The literacy leader modelled teaching practice at staff meetings and provided reading material.
- Staff went away and practised, then came back together to discuss work.
- Staff put together a programme of what seemed to work well.

The next step is to evaluate and revise the approach. Although at the time of our interviews this work was new, the literacy leader had already noticed an impact:

> I've really noticed a huge difference in the quality of my kids' narrative writing. Because I say to my kids, 'When you are writing a narrative bear this in mind. Make sure that you've got the setting, themes running through, what is going to happen with the eventual outcome.' That's gone brilliantly. (literacy leader)

The new systems that were established for tracking students' learning were generally seen as useful to ensure that teachers focus on individual students:

> ERO made us aware of tracking kids from woah to go. Before it was syndicate-wise.

One teacher questioned whether all the paper work was always put to useful purpose, and another commented on the need to present information in an attractive way:

> I very seldom go back and use the same information again. Do we need all the information we gather?

> There are expectations to perform and present documentation that 'looks flash'.

Positive aspects highlighted by the literacy leader included the tight focus, the relevance to the needs of the school, and visible spin-off for staff, who were described as "excited and open to seeing each other teach". Teachers were supported through professional development to undertake the work. The literacy leader and principal thought that this whole school approach, combined with support through Ministry of Education contracts, was beneficial.

> I'd love to see the Ministry of Education provide this support in other curriculum areas. (literacy leader)
>
> Our staff are eager and excited and reflective about practice. They have good access to agencies and programmes to help them. (principal)

Another helpful literacy initiative has been the school's use of a part-time teacher (0.3) to support students who need help in reading. The appointment of this teacher followed the school's successful joint application with another school for additional funding. The 3 teacher aides are also trained to work with students on aspects of literacy. Criteria for assistance are set, and each teacher is asked to identify which students need help.

> There is not a child in the school who has not had help when it is needed. (literacy leader)

Some teachers and a parent commented that inclusion of children with special needs is a strength of the school. The school had taken some students that were not accepted by other schools. However, one parent thought that if children have a problem that is not behavioural, teachers are not well-trained to address it.

The school has recently opted to use the computer programme "3D Achieve" to help teachers with programme planning, and to keep track of assessments. All staff have had professional development to upskill them on their use of computers. Advantages were identified as the consistency achieved through all teachers using the same formats, and the time that is saved through use of the programme.

The school has also recently developed a web page and bought a digital camera and video for use by students.

The school works from a positive basis, with an emphasis on rewards for good work and achievements in competitions. Several reward systems operate:

- a behaviour management system, where staff "catch a student doing something good", put names in a hat, and draw two out each week for prizes;
- older students taking part in the Australian Schools Competition;
- the principal's "Student of the Week" award, where the student is named in the weekly newsletter to parents, and the winners attend the school's community morning tea;
- a "Whiz Kid" award, made on the recommendation of classroom teachers for effort, excellence, and positive classroom behaviour, and presented at Friday assemblies.

The new behaviour management system initiated by the deputy principal involves a series of "steps" on which children are put according to what they have done (the "offence"). These have a series of consequences or actions that need to follow. The range of consequences is:

- requiring an apology and name being noted for minor issues;
- letter writing, parents being notified, and a student being sent to the behaviour management room;
- in-school suspension, parents notified, and an appropriate written response;
- a parent-teacher conference and a behaviour management contract;
- stand-down procedures.

There is also a system to notify parents if an "offence" has occurred and to say what action is being taken. A letter is also sent to parents of students who have been the subject of offending by another child, detailing what action has been taken. An evaluation of the behaviour management programme showed that both students and parents supported it, and felt that behaviour had improved:

> Before there were no guidelines or boundaries. We had a lot of behaviour problems. STEPs was put in and it has got rid of the problem.
>
> It worked wonders. It was almost instant. (caretaker)

This school has made substantive positive changes. The school climate, physical environment, staff relationships, parent and staff communication, publicity, and behaviour are all greatly improved. Staff are well supported professionally, and there are new collaborative professional working relationships where school-wide goals are set in relation to curriculum, and action plans are developed and evaluated. Students are active in their own learning.

Students' Views of their Experiences at School

Year 8 Students

Overall, the 22 Year 8 students surveyed had positive views about their experiences at school. They felt most positive about a set of items related to their own sense of safety in the school, the enjoyment and friendships they experienced at school, and the reinforcement of good work by teachers. The school had a very low level of reported bullying. This lends support to the view that the school's behaviour management system and emphasis on co-operation has worked well to create a positive environment.

Many students were equivocal about a set of items related to their interest in school work, and their motivation for trying to do better work.

The things Year 8 students liked best about the school were:

- caring and/or friendly relationships with students and teachers (15), e.g., "how everyone is nice to each other", "people are friendly and caring", "kids look after the little kids";
- aspects of school work—some students singled out specific curriculum areas, others wrote generally about school work (12);
- the teachers are fair (8), e.g., "most of the teachers are fair and give us chances", "teachers are good and give us fair enough rules";
- the work of teachers to help sort out problems, and the behaviour management process (4);
- aspects of the playground and activities during breaks (4);
- competitions or awards for work (2).

The things Year 8 students would like to change about the school were mostly about outside activities. They were:

- more outside activities or equipment (18)—students gave specific ideas, e.g., they wanted to be able to play rugby, have two goal posts, a better swimming pool, being allowed to play on the bank (which is above the playing field and not part of the playground), more PE equipment; and 3 students wanted more for Years 7 and 8 to do;
- nothing (4), e.g., "It is perficly fine for me";
- poor behaviour (3), e.g., "change people into nice people to be my friends", "bad language to stop";
- more or new school subjects (2);
- school buildings (2), e.g., have a bigger hall and a canteen;
- the school rules (2);
- a full hour for lunch (1).
- the workload (1)

Year 4 Students

There was much less sense of safety in the playground, and a less favourable view of student behaviour, for Year 4 students compared with Year 8 students, with many Year 4 students feeling safe only sometimes. The principal attributed this to the Year 4 students being younger and having less mature social skills.

The things Year 4 students liked best about the school were:

- outdoor activities and games, and the playground (14);
- school work (13)—students singled out specific curriculum areas, with especially reading; 4 students wrote about the level of work, with 2 liking it because it was "hard", one because it was at the correct level, and one because it was easy;
- the teachers or the teachers' interactions with students (9), e.g., "teachers are kind to me", "teachers are fair to me";

- friendships or liking of people (9);
- prizes and awards (6);
- people are helpful and nice (3);
- there is a sense of safety (2);
- bad behaviour is dealt with (1), e.g., "people don't get away with their crimes";
- school lunches (1);
- the "hole school because it is neat and tidy" (1).

The things Year 4 students would like to change about the school were:

- more outdoor activities, games equipment, and the playground (8)—similar items as for Year 8 students were mentioned, e.g., having two goal posts, more PE gear, and being allowed to play on the bank;
- stop bad behaviour (8), e.g., "change the naughty children into good children", "change people when they ask me for food to eat my own lunch and what I have", "change all of the bullying and bad language. All the hitting";
- make the work easier (2) or more extensive (1);
- nothing (2);
- a better teacher (1);
- get to have pet day (1).

Teachers' Views

Profile of Teachers Who Completed Surveys

Sex	Female	10	
Position	Classroom teacher	4	
	Part-time teacher	2	
	Specialist teacher	2	(including 1 part-time)
	Assistant principal	1	
	Deputy principal	1	
Years of teaching experience	Less than 2	2	
	2–4 years		
	5–10 years	2	
	11–20 years	2	
	21 plus years	4	
Years at Phoenix School	Less than 2	2	
	2–4 years	2	
	5–10 years		
	11–20 years	6	
	21 plus years		

Qualifications	One teacher had a Bachelor of Education (Teaching). In addition to Dip Tchg, other teachers had other qualifications as follows: 14 papers for Q3, TTC (2), BA, Reading Recovery trained
Membership of professional organisations	NZEI (7)

Most of the items ranked highest by all teachers were about attitudes to learning and behaviour, and positive relationships—between staff and students, staff and parents, and among staff. Teachers noted a focus on success and clear behaviour standards.

The open and clear communication and respectful relationships described as a feature of this school were notable in teachers' responses to a range of items about relationships with community, respect for students, clarity for parents of behavioural standards, availability of senior staff to discuss teaching and curriculum matters, and inclusion of support staff in the school. There was a strong indication that the climate of the school is supportive and attractive, that teachers are learners too, and that parents' involvement is encouraged.

Items that showed variable responses related to strategic planning, particularly whether support staff and students have input into the school strategic plan. There were variable responses about whether the school provides joint staff planning time, or whether staff regularly observe and give each other feedback about teaching. These are conditions that could support a collaborative approach to teaching and learning.

Three or four of the teachers responded "don't know" to items about views of change, because of the short time they had been at the school. Teachers most strongly agreed that there had been improvement in student behaviour, positive changes to the way the school was run, and parents' demonstration of interest in children's learning. Most variable responses and uncertainty were about whether there had been increased contact with other schools and teaching te reo Māori.

Teachers' views of the achievements of the school over the last 3–4 years were:

- There are more positive relationships between management and staff, high staff morale and a happier environment. There is a greater commitment of staff to the school and staff are working together towards common goals. The school takes pride in academic achievement. Open communication occurs between management and staff, and senior staff are effective leaders.
- The behaviour management system has been implemented and positive change in student behaviour is evident.
- There is thorough documentation of student learning.
- The poor public image of the school held in the past has been turned around, and it is now held in high public regard.
- The rolls have increased.

Most teachers thought the school's current strengths were the positive climate, recognition and support for staff, good staff communication and teamwork, and staff energy. Strong leadership was identified as a feature of the school.

Teachers regarded the school's curriculum delivery as a strength, with staff working to give every child the best possible learning experiences. Some processes were highlighted, i.e., thorough documentation, supportive accountability, planning, and ongoing evaluation of the direction of the school.

High standards of behaviour, clarity of expectations, and positive incentives were also seen as strengths.

Other positive features were the good communications, and the involvement and support of families in the school.

The changes teachers would like related to:

- curriculum, i.e., more emphasis on teaching of thinking and problem-solving skills, and addressing teaching practices to gain consistency in areas other than English;
- processes to support teaching and learning, i.e., having an opportunity to plan as a syndicate in school time maybe twice a year, whole school professional development in numeracy;
- conditions to support curriculum delivery, i.e., smaller class ratio of pupils to teachers, new hall facilities to be used for arts, PE type activities, larger or more realistic budgets for curriculum, and budgets that "do not have to be frozen during the year", undertaking only paperwork that is beneficial;
- continuance of positive roll growth and momentum;
- continued mix of teacher ages and interests.

Support Staff Views

Profile of Support Staff Who Completed Surveys

Sex	Female	6
Position	Teacher aide	3
	Deputy librarian	
	Office manager	1
	Office assistant	1
	Caretaker/cleaner	1
Years at Phoenix School	Less than 2	1
	2–4 years	1
	5–10 years	4
	11–20 years	
	21 plus years	

Qualifications	"Nets" reading qualification and Stotts short story writing, Pitman word processing, Teacher Aide certificate (2), School Certificate (1), UE
Membership of professional organisations	NZEI (2) and Office Managers' network

Views of the 6 support staff tended to be in accord with those of teachers. Most of the items ranked highest by support staff were about respectful relationships (between staff, teachers and students, staff and community, staff and parents), and orientation towards success. Support staff thought there was clarity of communication about the school vision and behavioural standards. Support staff like working in the school and thought new staff were supported.

There were variable responses on 2 items related to strategic planning and staff meeting time, i.e., whether support staff have input into the school's strategic plan, and whether staff meeting times are spent on important things.

Three or four of the 6 support staff responded "don't know" or "uncertain" to the questions on change over time, so their responses are not reported here.

Support staff noted similar achievements to those noted by teachers in the ethos of the school, effective leadership, and improved student behaviour. They also commented on turning the school around from an unfavourable ERO review, and initiating new families into the school.

Two of the support staff did not respond to questions about change, because they had not been at the school for the period under question.

Three support staff identified interest, expectations, or focus on children's learning and achievement as a current strength. Two support staff identified the positive climate and valuing all those involved as a current strength. Other strengths were identified as:

- students being keen to try anything and seeming proud of the school;
- behaviour initiative programme.

Support staff would like to see the following changes:

- steady satisfactory roll;
- more male teachers;
- principal more engaged in the classroom;
- better ICT equipment;
- no change.

Summary

Phoenix School worked systematically and purposefully to address a strikingly poor public image, tensions between and within staff and community, the flight of families from the school, and a dysfunctional school board. There is evidence that change in senior staff and the effective leadership and focus were crucial to the turn-around that was achieved over a period of a year. In 2001, change was apparent in the positive publicity about the school, an increasing roll, the development of sound policies and systems, improved student behaviour, analysis and planning for student learning, and a positive, respectful open climate where staff, parents, and students were supported in their contributions.

A number of elements appear to be key to the success of this school in making substantive changes:

- the resignation of the school principal and appointment of both a new principal and a deputy principal, who created a strong senior management team with existing staff;
- the willingness of senior staff to call in and use outside support from Ministry of Education School Support Services, School Trustees Association, and advisers from the college of education's "Human Resources in Schools", and attendance by the principal on several external courses, including "Marketing your school";
- the willingness of the principal to accept collegial support from principal colleagues and professional support from an outside appraiser;
- the working relationship established between the principal and the new board of trustees chair (who was co-opted to the board);
- the use made of ERO's review to pinpoint changes that needed to occur, and tenacity in following through with single-minded action;
- efforts to get all people involved in the school "on board" in making changes;
- school-wide professional development in curriculum areas.

A notable feature was that staff worked very hard in many areas to effect changes to the school's operation and image.

Table 37

Year 8 Students' Views of Their Experience at School (n=22)

School is a place where	Mostly	Sometimes	Never/hardly ever	No response
I feel safe in the playground	20	1	1	
I have good friends	19	3	0	
My teacher tells me when I do good work	18	4	0	
I enjoy myself	16	6	0	
Teachers treat me fairly	13	7	2	
The rules are fair	12	8	1	
I get all the help I need	12	10	0	
Teachers help me to improve my work	11	11	0	
Teachers listen to what I say	11	10	1	
Teachers explain things clearly to me	11	11	0	
I keep out of trouble	10	12	0	
I learn most things pretty quickly	10	10	2	
I can learn what I need for the future	9	13	0	
I like my teachers	9	13	0	
I could do better work if I tried	7	14	1	
I do interesting things	6	15	1	
Students behave well in class	5	16	1	
I feel lonely	4	3	15	
I get bored	4	14	4	
I get tired of trying	4	12	6	
I get a hard time	1	6	15	
I get upset	1	6	15	
I feel restless	1	11	10	
I get bullied	0	4	18	

Table 38

Year 4 Students' Views of Their Experience at School (n=26)

School is a place where	Mostly n=	Sometimes n=	Never/hardly ever n=
I try hard at school	22	3	1
My teacher tells me when I do good work	19	4	3
My teacher is fair to me	18	5	3
I belong in this school	18	6	2
My teacher helps me to do better work	17	7	2
I like my school	14	10	2
My teacher is kind to me	14	10	2
I like my work	10	16	0
I feel safe in the playground	6	17	3
Children in my class behave well	3	17	6

Table 39

Teachers' Views of Their School (n=10)

The school now	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	No response
Teachers believe that all children can be successful	10				
Teachers regularly monitor the learning and progress of individual children	10				
The primary concern of everyone in the school is student learning	10				
Teachers in this school believe that all students can learn	10				
Student success is regularly celebrated in this school	10				
Students are clear about standards of behaviour expected in the school	10				
Staff in this school work hard to promote and maintain good relations with the community	9	1			
Senior staff are available to discuss curriculum/teaching matters	9	1			
Teachers respect students	9	1			
Parents are clear about behaviour standards expected in school	9	1			
Teachers in this school believe that all students can be successful	9	1			
Non-teaching staff feel involved in the life of the school	9	1			
Staff encourage students to try their best	8	2			
New staff are well supported in this school	8	2			
There is mutual respect between staff and senior staff in this school	8	2			
Teachers like working in the school	8	2			
Staff have a commitment to the whole school and not just their class or syndicate	8	2			
Teachers pay attention to keeping the school environment attractive	8	2			
Adults (teachers) as well as students learn in this school	8	2			
The staff encourage parents to be involved in the school	8	2			
Expectations about school work are communicated clearly to all students	8	1	1		
Students' work is prominently displayed	8	1			1
Teachers regularly collaborate to plan their teaching	7	3			
If staff have a problem with their teaching they usually turn to colleagues for help	7	3			
Disruption in classes is dealt with promptly so that learning for all students can proceed	7	3			
Teachers regularly discuss ways of improving students' learning	7	2	1		
The school communicates clearly to parents the standard of work it expects from students	7	2	1		
There is effective communication between senior staff and teachers	7	1	1		1
The senior staff communicate a clear vision of where the school is going	7	1	1		1
Senior staff openly recognise teachers when they do things well	7	1	1		1
There is effective communication among teachers	6	4			
Extra-curricular activities provide valuable opportunities for all students	6	4			
Teachers have a say in the school strategic plan	6	1	1		2
Decision-making processes are fair	5	5			
Every attempt is made to set challenging standards of achievement for each student	5	5			
Staff feel encouraged to bring forward new ideas	5	4	1		
Whole school meetings are worthwhile	5	3	1		1
Teachers have a say in topics selected for the school's staff development programme	5	3	1		1
At staff meetings time is spent on important things rather than on minor issues	5	3	1		1
Standards set for students are consistently upheld across the school	5	3	2		
The school development plan includes practical ways of evaluating success in achieving goals and targets	5	3	1		1

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The school now	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	No response
Teachers encourage students to be independent learners	4	6			
Staff development time is used effectively in the school	4	6			
There is regular staff discussion about how to achieve school goals and targets	4	4	1		1
Students respect teachers	3	6	1		
Staff ensure that students receive constructive feedback about their work	3	6		1	
Teachers share similar beliefs and attitudes about effective teaching/learning	3	6	1		
Non-teaching staff have input into the school strategic plan	3	3	3	1	
Students in this school are enthusiastic about learning	2	7	1		
The board of trustees plays a significant role in supporting developments within the school	2	6	1		1
Staff participate in important decision making	2	5	3		
Teachers regularly observe each other in the classroom and give each other feedback	2	4	2	2	
Students have some say in the school strategic plan	2	2	4	2	
The school allows staff joint planning time		3	2	5	

Table 40

Support Staff Views of Their School (n=6)

The school now	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	No response
Teachers respect students	6				
Staff in this school work hard to promote and maintain good relations with the community	5	1			
There is mutual respect between staff and senior staff in this school	5	1			
The primary concern of everyone in the school is student learning	5	1			
The senior staff communicate a clear vision of where the school is going	5		1		
Parents are clear about behaviour standards expected in the school	5	1			
Support staff like working in this school	5	1			
Teachers in this school believe that all students can be successful	5	1			
Students' work is prominently displayed	5	1			
Student success is regularly celebrated in this school	5	1			
New staff are well supported in this school	5	1			
The staff encourage parents to be involved in the school	5	1			
Students are clear about standards of behaviour expected in the school	5	1			
Teachers in this school believe that all students can learn	5	1			
Staff encourage students to try their very best	4	2			
Teachers believe that all children can be successful	4	2			
Staff feel encouraged to bring forward new ideas	4	1	1		
Staff pay attention to keeping the school environment attractive	4	2			
The school communicates clearly to parents the standard of work it expects from students	4	1	1		
Support staff feel involved in the life of the school	4	2			
Standards set for students are consistently upheld across the school	4	2			
Senior staff openly recognise support staff when they do things well	4	1		1	
Staff participate in important decision making	3	1	2		
Staff have a commitment to the whole school and not just their class or syndicate	3	3			
Support staff have input into the school strategic plan	3	1		2	
Disruption in classes is dealt with promptly so that learning for all students can proceed	3	2		1	
The school development plan includes practical ways of evaluating success in achieving goals and targets	3	2	1		
Extra-curricular activities provide valuable opportunities for all students	3	3			
Students respect staff	2	3	1		
Whole school meetings are worthwhile	2	3	1		
There is effective communication between teachers and support staff	2	4			
Staff development time is used effectively in the school	2	3	1		
There is regular staff discussion about how to achieve school goals/targets	2	4			
There is effective communication among staff	1	5			
Decision-making processes are fair	1	4	1		
Students in this school are enthusiastic about learning	1	4	1		
Adults as well as students learn in this school	1	3	1		1
The board of trustees plays a significant role in supporting developments with the school	1	4	1		
At staff meetings time is spent on important things rather than on minor issues		2	3		1

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Table 41

Teachers' Views of Change Over the Last 3–4 Years (n=10)

Change over the last 3-4 years	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Don't know	No response
Student behaviour has improved	4	1		1	3	1
We have made positive changes to the way the school runs	4			1	3	2
Parents show more interest in their children's learning	4	1		1		4
We enjoy our work more	3	2		1	3	1
We have more professional development	3	2		1	3	1
We have made positive changes to how we plan ahead	3	1		1	4	1
We monitor our progress more	3	1		1	4	1
We acknowledge children's cultures more	3			1	4	2
We expect more of our students	2	3		1	3	1
We have made positive changes to the way we teach	2	3		1	3	1
We have more contact with other schools	1			1	5	3
We make more use of te reo Māori	1	1		1	4	3

VENTURE INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL

Introduction

Venture Intermediate School Profile

School type	Intermediate	
Roll size	585	
Decile rating	2	
Locality	Suburban	
Student ethnicity	Pākehā	– 55%
	Māori	– 23%
	Asian	– 6%
	Pasifika	– 13%
	Other	– 3%
Staffing entitlement	28.9	
Actual staffing	33 full-time, 5 part-time	
Recommended	Acknowledged by a Ministry of Education official as a successful low decile school for several years. Has had to institute an enrolment scheme to limit numbers.	

Venture Intermediate is a suburban intermediate school. Large numbers of students come from financially and educationally disadvantaged homes that are adversely affected by issues such as unemployment.

Recently, significant numbers of new settlers from countries such as Somalia and Ethiopia, for whom Venture Intermediate may be their first experience of schooling, have been enrolled, and now make up the "other" 3 percent of the roll. As the Executive Officer commented, in relation to the provision of school uniforms for these students, "I didn't dream that we'd be outfitting children we used to collect for Corso for. We don't need to travel, the world comes to us."

The school has 33 teaching staff, and 9 teacher aides, plus 5 part-time teachers who support special needs programmes, including ESL and extension activities. The school also has an attached Special Education Unit, with 2 teaching staff and 5 support staff, for children with significant intellectual and multiple disabilities. Four Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour (RTLBs) are located at the school. The unit and the RTLBs serve a cluster of local schools.

One classroom of students has been located in an office building in the local downtown area since 2000. This class is created each term with 1–2 students from each class, selected for their demonstrated ability to work successfully in a co-operative environment. The class has a different educational focus each term. Students attend classes on campus one day a week, but spend the rest of the time in the city, using local facilities such as the public library, art museum, and recreational facilities. Teacher and student evaluations of this initiative are very positive.

The principal has been at the school for over 11 years, and the deputy principals have both been at the school for a significant time—one has spent his entire career of 25 years on the staff at Venture Intermediate. The executive officer has been with the school for 27 years. Several members of the board of trustees have remained with the board long after their children left the school.

In this school we interviewed the principal, the board of trustees chair, the executive officer, the literacy leader, the science leader, 2 other teachers, and a teacher aide. We did not interview any parents. We chose this school because it has been acknowledged as a successful school for several years. It consistently receives sound ERO reports, and attracts students from neighbouring communities. Recently it has had to institute an enrolment scheme to limit numbers. This is unusual in a low decile school, as in the last 5 years, low decile schools tend to have experienced very little or no roll growth.[12]

The Past

The school has not always had a positive reputation. Soon after the current principal was appointed, 2 local primary schools had applications for recapitation in progress. A national magazine article on social conditions in the area in 1990 did little to enhance community confidence in the quality of education available at the school.

The principal described the school environment as run down, with large amounts of litter and graffiti. While there were many effective teachers, there were some long-term relieving staff who had made very little positive impact upon the school, and some syndicates which lacked leadership and direction.

The previous principal had resigned, leaving a staff with low morale, despite their commitment to the students, and a school with a diminishing roll. The principal explained that:

> The community was voicing disquiet and voting with their feet. But what I found when I came here was a very large core of very dedicated teachers who were sick of the way things were, had got dispirited and disheartened, but still believed in the importance of what they were doing. . . . Now those staff, many of them are still with us and they're dedicated and committed to the changes that we've put in place.

Looking back, the principal considers that the major changes that occurred under his leadership happened within the first 2 years of his appointment. He claims that there were several key things he needed to do to turn the school around. The first was to change the culture of the school.

Because of the threat of recapitation, he determined that "this was not a time for collaborative, strategic planning". He launched a day of change and declared an emergency. "If I hadn't had one, I would have had to create it."

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[12] *Compulsory Schools Sector in New Zealand 2000* – Minister of Education.

The recapitation proposal was seen as a common enemy that the school had to resist. He declared 19 September "the end of bad news day". From that date, no one was permitted to denigrate the school, and there was to be a focus on positive, visible achievements. The emphasis was on self-belief, good news, targeting good behaviour, and acknowledging that the school, staff, and students were "special". A teacher aide who has been with the school for 13 years said, "From the first day he made you believe that this could be an amazing school. He sold this idea to us, made us believe it."

The school environment was addressed early, and the school was repainted, rooms carpeted, and curtains and new furniture provided. In the principal's view, these were important signals to both the students and the staff that they were worthy of a decent place to work.

There was a focus on student behaviour within the school and the community. A "Kids in the Community" reward and reinforcement scheme was instigated, whereby local shopkeepers were encouraged to notice and reinforce polite and appropriate behaviour.

Efforts were made to improve relationships in the playground between Year 7 and Year 8 students, and to begin an ethos of success by focusing on achievement in sports.

One teacher who began teaching at the school in 1989 saw the intermediate as two separate schools, a Year 7 school, and a Year 8 school. The year groups were separated because of bullying, and the Year 7 students were not permitted in the Year 8 playground. "The physical education shed was a cupboard and contained three cartons of expensive cricket gear and not much else."

According to this teacher, the school sports team had a record of failure. "We always came last. That was what was expected to happen." She considered that improvements in sporting results began with an initial "open budget" for sports equipment. This, combined with staff commitment, raised the whole profile of sport in the school, and over time the school "began to win". "Now we are the school that everyone wants to beat."

The principal considers that the focus on sports encourages students to think "Gosh, this is an exciting new place." The school capitalises on the motivation engendered by sporting success to influence academic success.

A critical challenge for the principal was the raising of expectations for the achievement of students. It was necessary to "move on the small numbers of staff who did not believe in the ability of each child to learn successfully".

All those who worked in the school were required to demonstrate an absolute commitment to its students and to the challenges of its community. As the principal commented, "some people would never want to work here, and some people would never want to work anywhere else".

School structures were adapted to meet the needs of the different kinds of students within the school. For example, separate Year 7 and Year 8 classes became composite classes grouped in syndicates, to allow students to feel that they were part of a small, personal unit within the wider, larger school, and to encourage collaborative relationships between teachers. "Syndicates are very important to us. Three to four classes are grouped together for friendship and doing things together. This provides a sense of belonging for students." The school's latest ERO review (December 2001) commented positively on the school's syndicate organisation.

In 2000, there was a catastrophic fire that demolished an entire 5 classroom block, associated toilets, cloak bays, and storerooms. The response to this experience demonstrated the commitment of the entire educational community to ensuring that children's education was not adversely affected. The principal told us that the fire was noticed at 2.00 pm on a Saturday afternoon. By 4.00 pm he was at a strategy meeting with the Ministry of Education, and relocatable classrooms were on site by Monday morning. The school now has 6 new networked classrooms, an adventure playground, and a much-enhanced environment. This has raised expectations for the upgrade of other existing classrooms.

The School Now

The principal, trustees, and staff have a strong commitment to the role of intermediate schools within the school system. The principal expressed this as:

> I want the community here to believe that their kids are going to get the most wonderful years of their educational life, so that they'll see this as the jewel in the ring, rather than the empty space.

The school offers students a wide range of activities and learning opportunities in addition to the National Curriculum. Students are encouraged to take advantage of a wide range of opportunities in which they may participate and discover particular strengths and interest. Extra-curricular activities include cultural and sporting groups, extension and enrichment programmes, competitive academic programmes, and leisure activities. In addition, there has been an increased focus on learning and teaching, and associated professional development. The revised mission statement of the school became "fully focused on learning", and this intention continues to underpin the work of the school.

The major curriculum focus has been in the area of literacy. Both teacher knowledge and pedagogy have been targeted.

Over time, efforts have been made to recruit teachers who have particular strengths to offer intermediate-aged students. New staff are selected who will complement current staff skills and talents. There is now a better balance of younger and more experienced staff, and more male, Māori, and Pasifika teachers. The large number of staff who have personal skills and interests in sports and in the arts appear particularly motivating for students of this age group.

Staff are actively involved in the wider life of the school. "The teachers don't just sit in the staffroom and eat their lunch. If our school makes a final, the staff go. Kids like it when teachers turn out." (teacher)

Staff who leave the school remain keenly interested in it, and are sometimes re-employed after leaving for travel or parental reasons.

The school continues to welcome and support children with special needs. One teacher commented, "We welcome special needs kids, therefore we have a high loading of them. We have to have teachers who are happy to toilet." Children who several years ago would have been in the attached Special Education Unit are now regular class members. The school strategy is to place ORS funded students in several classrooms in one syndicate, which allows utilisation of staff strengths, effective use of resources, and co-ordination of additional services, such as teacher aide time.

Staff at Venture Intermediate are involved in educational initiatives beyond classroom teaching. They are participants in science, social studies, and English exemplar projects. Researchers are studying a teacher's science teaching, and a staff member has been employed as a part-time lecturer in a local teacher education programme. The school's emphasis on encouraging teachers to read to their classes has recently been used as a case study example in the Literacy Leadership professional development programme.

For this school, "budgeting has never been a headache", and it has relished the opportunity to build on previous achievements and continue to improve. When the school was directly resourced for teachers' salaries, it appreciated the additional funding that was provided.

Despite the school's decile 2 status, parents typically pay the voluntary donation. This may be partially due to the advocacy of the school's executive officer. When parents come to enrol their children, she offers them the opportunity to set up fortnightly automatic payments to cover the costs of uniform, school donation, technology fees, and school camp fees. Many parents welcome this option, and the executive officer considers that this arrangement strengthens parental self-respect and responsibility.

Several factors appear to account for this school's progress from one with a poor reputation to one that has been acknowledged for several years demonstrating sustainable development. The most compelling factors are:

- leadership;
- stability in governance and management;
- building staff knowledge and skills;
- school–community links.

Leadership

The principal of this school has qualities of leadership that have fostered the development of a school culture which brings out the best in staff and students, and which supports a safe and supportive learning environment.

The principal is convinced that the leadership of the principal is a critical factor in school improvement:

> I do not think that you can under-rate the importance of the leadership. The research says the same thing. And the community here says the same thing too. . . . I have worked very hard in this school. The community recognises that I'm a pivotal part of what's happened here. And they say so. And the staff recognise it.

As well as clear direction from the principal, there is a sense of unity and common purpose within the senior management team. This common front is achieved after robust and honest confrontation of issues "behind closed doors". Keeping the dialogue open is important. The principal describes his deputy principals as "not only very experienced but able to apply wisdom and rein me back in when I am getting out of kilter with realities, which can happen sooo easily to all principals". He acknowledges their long-term commitment to the school, as well as their professional and personal loyalty. There is also opportunity for other staff to take a leadership role when appropriate, especially when they have particular curriculum strengths.

The principal also demonstrates what he calls "situational leadership" skills, which appear to be the interpersonal and cognitive skills to assess what needs to be done in particular situations, and to be able to utilise staff strengths to achieve what should be achieved. While schools are all required to work towards broadly similar ends, each school has different issues from others that require different approaches and solutions. To pinpoint the approach that is the "best fit" for a particular school and community requires the ability to read, interpret, and respond to the specific attributes of that school culture.

He has invested much of his professional life in improving opportunities for students in his community. A long-term commitment to these values is part of the picture of sustainable school improvement. Implicit in the notion of continuous improvement is the sense that "we can always do better. The senior management in the school and the principal have to be continually questioning what's going on: Is this good enough? Can we accept that? Surely there must be a better way of doing this? Why can't we get kids to learn this area? So that is absolutely fundamental. There has to be leadership that questions constantly." (principal)

The school seeks to employ staff who are prepared to question and challenge their own beliefs and those of others.

> I think that is important: when you get a significant number of staff who have that way of thinking, then it's a critical mass factor, and the rest of the staff will start to go with them. So this idea of reflective people who want to look at their own practice and the practice of their colleagues, and pick out the best and get rid of the worst, and improve constantly—that's fundamental to it as well.
>
> I don't know quite how we do pick them, but we're looking to constantly pick up people who are reflective in nature. We don't talk about it in those terms very much. What we're looking for—the term that we use is, "We're looking for people who fit our school culture." . . . So we have this mental picture of the sort of teacher that we're looking for. And we find that we can now measure up against that, very quickly.

Teachers in this school work hard to support each other, and to reinforce the expectation that teaching in this school requires a level of commitment that extends beyond minimum requirements. A new staff member commented, "When you come in, staff are welcoming. They get you involved. They pull you in and you are encouraged by the other staff." Staff talked about their awareness that the school should provide opportunities for children that they may not access elsewhere. Extra-curricular activities, lunchtime programmes, sports activities, and support for students' homework are seen as core expectations.

Despite the commitment of teachers, there are various factors that make the work of teachers particularly challenging in this school. One teacher said that having a class of 30 students in quite a small room limits the opportunities she has to really get to know them as individuals, and to respond to their many needs. She felt that if she had fewer students, "I would actually talk to the kids. Have a relationship with them."

She has also found her students at this school require far more from her than those she has previously taught:

> . . . some challenging kids make it really hard to have a classroom that's ticking over nicely. There are also some kids that are so far behind, it is hard to do anything with them. I really struggle with this.

She believes that the thought that keeps her going is "Next year I might get a better class", as she considers that she risks getting "worn out". Despite these tensions, she said, "I don't see myself moving soon. I really like it here."

Stability in Governance and Management

Frequent emphasis was given to the stability of governance and management as contributing to ongoing improvement. As well as a long-serving principal and senior staff, the board chair has been on the board of trustees for 9 years, 7 as chair. He has lived in the area for most of his life. He brings expertise in property management to the board, as well as a long-standing commitment to parent involvement in education. He served on the board of trustees of his local primary school and is also a member of the board of trustees of the local secondary school. Board membership has been very stable, perhaps too stable in his view, as many board members are no longer parents of children at the school. However, this reflects the commitment of the community as a whole to the school, and allows for the retention of knowledge and skill on the board, particularly in a low decile area. Staff appreciate the support and involvement of the board, particularly the fact that it ensures that all staff members are publicly respected and valued.

The board chair describes his relationship with the principal as "more than excellent". He believes that the principal keeps him informed of important issues when appropriate. He feels comfortable raising issues of concern with the principal, and believes that they have a relationship that allows them to work through and resolve any problems.

In his view, the board of trustees plays an "overseeing role". Both the principal and chair describe the role of the board as one of governance, and acknowledge the importance of a board which sees its function as more than "rubber stamping". The chair sees the board as the link between the community and the school. The board is keen to know how the school processes take place, and he acknowledges that the board has an obligation to be assured that the policy and practices within the school result in the meeting of Ministry requirements. He looks back at the early days of charter development and thinks "Oh gosh, couldn't we have made that more simple?" He now thinks that it is relatively easy to indicate what is important to the school in simple language, in a few words in an information brochure to parents.

He appreciates the work done by school staff in informing the board about students' progress. He is not interested in extensive documentation regarding pupils' progress, and wonders, "Can we get ourselves into a situation where we spend all our time assessing and not really teaching?"

The board is fully involved in the school self-review process, where the principal and staff review the previous year and forecast future directions and answer questions. Most board members attend. The board and teachers and staff then break into groups, discuss issues of continuing importance to the school, and set goals for future action.

The board chair believes that over the years, good governance by the board has enabled school property to be well managed and improved. These improvements include changing the layout of the library to allow for innovation in ICT, and a completely revamped foyer/reception area, redesigned to convey a friendly, welcoming atmosphere. Improvements also include provision for children with physical disabilities, and recently the installation of an "inter-active wall" in the special education unit.

In his view, the school has always managed its finances particularly well. This is partly due to the long-standing presence on the board of a financial manager, who has managed funds to support the strategic objectives of the school. This perhaps has contributed to the perception of staff that there is always money available to support learning and teaching in the school. As one teacher commented, "You never have to spend your own money. If you do you're a mug." "If you want ten rolls of cellotape because you're doing construction, you just go and get them."

The board chair also believes that a strength of the board, along with the stability of its members, has been a willingness to respond to new ideas and different approaches suggested by staff, or from within the board. One of the enhancements to the environment of which he is extremely proud is the Māori carving in the school's assembly hall, which was completed over a period of years by groups of children, under the guidance of the art teacher and a former student.

Building Staff Knowledge and Skills

Venture Intermediate places considerable importance upon investing in teacher knowledge. For example, in 1998, the principal and 6 teachers enrolled in a teacher education programme to upgrade their teaching diplomas to degree status. While this was an expensive undertaking for the school, teachers report that this experience broadened their horizons and extended their teaching knowledge. One teacher said, "It was getting back in touch with learning for ourselves," and "it really made you look at your own teaching." This teacher also commented that it provided a wider perspective on educational issues outside the world of her own classroom and school.

The fact that the principal was also willing publicly to model "principal as learner" was a powerful signal to teachers of the importance placed upon ongoing learning. There are continuing initiatives to build capability within the staff. Continuing teacher learning, guiding, mentoring, and encouraging are seen as essential to sustained improvement within the school. Staff are also encouraged to participate in professional activities that extend beyond the school, to bring a wider perspective to their roles, and to contribute to the broad educational learning community.

The school is prepared to fund individual staff development in areas desired by staff, as well as wider whole school development, because of the belief that teachers' passions as well as school needs should be encouraged. A teacher aide commented, "I can have any professional development I want. If I see a teachers' course I can do it." As she has been required to work with children with autism, she has been able to attend conferences in this area.

The school is prepared to use external agencies when they are able to tailor their material to the specific needs of the school. The principal called this "scratching the right itch". When selecting external advice, the school considers the credibility and capability of the presenters to be of the utmost importance. He is not prepared to squander teachers' time on professional development that does not have an impact on teacher knowledge and skill.

Internal professional development is also available to staff, with one teacher being released 0.7 from classroom teaching to co-ordinate professional development and programmes for students with special needs. This teacher has developed many strategies for gaining her colleagues' confidence, and willingness to improve their own teaching. For example, she regularly surveys staff needs, then targets professional development to address those needs. Individual coaching and support, including individual or small group assistance, observation of other teachers, and in-class support, is provided to all teachers who request it. Not all teachers, however, have been responsive to these opportunities, particularly some who need it most. This has resulted in some inconsistency in the quality of teaching programmes in the classrooms of teachers who chose not to take advantage of peer support.

The literacy leader talked about the school's approach to improving literacy levels in the school, through its focus on professional development. Through her knowledge of class programmes, she considered that a significant number of classroom teachers were not systematically teaching reading. The school initiated a school-wide literacy focus as part of its strategic focus. As intermediate schools were not eligible to participate in the Ministry of Education's Literacy Leadership programme, the school funded its own professional development programme.

This had several components. The first was a new emphasis on reading aloud to students. A wide variety of materials were bought for this purpose, including picture books, short novels, non-fiction books, and magazines. A college of education literacy advisor modelled strategies for using these materials with students, and "won a few over" to the pleasures of enjoying books with their classes. According to the literacy leader, this approach generated an enthusiasm for reading, and a renewed interest in the school library. The school has purchased multiple copies of high-interest, low-vocabulary books to encourage previously "reluctant readers". The library is open during the day for students to use when the need arises, and student borrowing of books has significantly increased.

The school employed other literacy consultants for specific purposes. A lecturer from a college of education worked with each syndicate in the school over a 3-day period to examine their long-term literacy plans and approaches. She provided advice and guidance on their work, and ran a whole staff meeting on the teaching of spelling. Other teachers were funded to attend a course on writing for senior students held at a teachers' centre during a holiday break.

The focus then moved to developing quality writing programmes across the school. This focus has been ongoing for 2 years, and teachers have been working with a local facilitator to improve their own personal understandings of the writing process, by examining samples of their students' writing, and by developing benchmarks for effective writing for different writing genres at different curriculum levels. Teachers spend time together talking about why they have classified work into particular categories.

This work highlighted for teachers the depth of knowledge required to look at, evaluate, and assess student learning, and to understand where the next steps are for individual learners. They saw the importance of using assessment to help themselves and their students to share understandings of what has been achieved, and set goals for improvement.

As a consequence, teachers are improving their formative assessment processes. The deputy principal is leading efforts to improve the quality of written formative feedback provided to students. This provides information to other teachers and students about ongoing progress in learning. Formative assessment has now been identified as an essential feature of classroom work, and several teachers we spoke to saw the need for further emphasis and staff development in this.

As the school has become more sophisticated in the collection and analysis of student assessment data, parents are now given information which allows them to better understand what their children are learning, and how well they are achieving in relation to expected achievement levels. School reports show the New Zealand Curriculum Framework levels, and note that most students at Years 7 and 8 will be achieving success at levels 3 and 4. Students are also assessed within those levels on their attainment in English, mathematics, social studies, science, health, and physical education. These levels are described as: initial development, becoming competent, fully competent, and high-quality achievement. Reports therefore show how well students are achieving in the level they are working.

The science leader in this school acknowledged that the teaching of science is often "neglected" in schools. She said that while she liked teaching science she did not consider that she had particular skills in this area. She had taken a course to help her gain more skills but found that it was aimed more towards secondary teaching..

She saw her role as science leader mostly in terms of managing resources and responding to requests from teachers. She described how she had recently assembled a "kitchen chemistry" kitset for a particular teacher. She has spent considerable time making up science kits to support the teaching of science units, but considered that it was difficult for teachers to do science in a classroom that was not equipped for specialist teaching. "Who wants to be first to burn a hole in the carpet?" she said.

She also makes teachers aware of new resources, describing the "Making Sense" booklets produced for the Ministry of Education as "so, so, good. Some teachers haven't realised how good they are." These booklets were introduced with significant professional development from the college of education. She was unaware of the new science resource

"Science Concepts", which was sent to schools without accompanying professional development.

School–Community Links

This school has many processes in place to build productive relationships with its community. It acknowledges that the school must reach out to parents to encourage their involvement, for while parents have similar aspirations to those in other areas, they may not have the social, cultural, or educational background that enables them to feel confident in approaching the school. The school has several strategies to encourage parents to feel comfortable about being involved with the school.

> The first thing we do is, right at the start of the year, within the first two weeks, every teacher makes contact with every family. The teachers initiate the contact. Just make a phone call—'Hi, I'm so-and-so, I'm your son's teacher. . . . Just thought I'd give you a call and say that he's doing really well for a start, and any problems, give us a call here; or just pop down and see me, I'd be really pleased to make some time available for you after school any day at all. (principal)

Staff are careful not to create barriers that will alienate parents, such as requiring them to make formal appointments to talk to classroom teachers.

Teachers are expected to treat parents with respect, and to be responsive to parent concerns or complaints.

> To me the most successful slogan that we could adopt for our schools would be the LV Martin slogan: 'It's the putting right that counts.' Because every school stuffs things up. And every parent, at some stage in their child's school career, will have a time when they're unhappy about something that's happened. And how we handle that is really vital. And if I become defensive when a parent approaches me and says, 'Listen, I'm really concerned that the school isn't doing something about my child's reading yet,' and if I'm defensive and say, 'Well, we don't have enough resources, and your child is actually average for a child of his type,' and give parents that sort of bumf, they'll think that they've been fobbed off. And it's the same for teachers. So they've got to listen, to know that that's part of their job, to listen to their parents, to try to accommodate all reasonable requests if they can. It's that same issue—you make the school fit the kids and not the other way round. (principal)

Another strategy is to ensure that school events are appealing to parents. The first major school event is a school picnic.

> We take the entire school out to the beach. It's a mammoth organisational exercise and it requires a lot of hard work by staff, and we give the kids wonderful boating, sailing, canoeing, speedboat rides, fishing, jumping off the wharf, swimming, sandcastle competitions, and we try to get parents to help us

> with transport and come and stay for the day—and bring their preschoolers and feel like they're part of the community. So that's important. So there's a level of proactiveness there. (principal)

However, there is little day-to-day involvement of parents, as at most intermediates, and some staff consider that continuing efforts should be made to encourage parents to assist teachers with the wide variety of extra-curricular activities.

Teachers work hard to build productive relationships with contributing schools, so they can feel confident that their work with the children is respected and valued, and that it will be continued. Assessment data from contributing schools is used to assist teachers in their initial planning and teaching.

The school tries to work co-operatively with local secondary schools. One teacher mentioned that this has been less successful, as these schools prefer to collect their own data. It can be dispiriting for children and teachers, as "kids who have been taught at level 2 are suddenly whipped up to level 5 and fail". Finding ways to manage the transition to secondary school so that progress is maintained is clearly an issue for this school, but suggestions to the secondary sector about curriculum adaptation have not been well received.

Students' Views of their Experiences at School

A class of 28 Year 7 and a class of 24 Year 8 students were selected to complete a questionnaire. It asked them to rate their degree of agreement with statements about their school, to identify what they liked best about their school, and to suggest possible changes.

Year 7 Students

The statement with the highest level of agreement referred to friends. All but one of the 28 students agreed that usually they had good friends at school. Two-thirds of the Year 7 students usually like their teachers, think that they are treated fairly, and consider that their teachers usually help them to improve their work.

Students' responses to items dealing with learning were less positive. About a third of students considered that only "sometimes" their teacher told them when they did good work, compared with 11 percent of students in the Competent Children at 10 study (Wylie, 2001). The same proportion thought that they got all the help they needed only "sometimes", compared with 19 percent in the Competent Children study. The students were also unclear that they were able to learn what they needed for their future. Half the students felt that this occurred only "sometimes", compared with 12 percent of students in the Competent Children survey. For this group of students, while most find school a positive place, a sizeable number appear to need more help and encouragement with their work.

In the section in the questionnaire which asked them what they liked best about the school, teachers were ranked first equal with sports. No students selected "never/hardly ever" to any of the positive statements about the school, and few agreed with negative statements, although 4 students considered that bullying was an issue for them.

As well as their strongly positive views of their teachers, shown by comments such as "The teachers are nice, they listen to you", and "Teachers are very understanding", students referred to opportunities to engage in sport, and to participate in a large range of school activities (6 comments). One student wrote, "How you can just go up and trial for things. If you're not sure how to do things the teachers will help you. Here you get the choice to do anything you want."

Relationships with peers are also valued highly. Students used adjectives such as "friendly" and "helpful" to describe their friends. One Year 7 student wrote, "We can walk around not trying to fit in."

Playing with friends at break times was liked by over half of the students, so it is not surprising that the play opportunities available in the playground were specifically commented on by a quarter of students, with comments such as "I like the big flash playground and being able to skateboard at school."

Although sports and playing were viewed the most positively, 6 students also took their school work seriously and appreciated the learning opportunities available to them:

> All the cool work.
>
> Learning heaps.
>
> We try to do our best so when we are older we can get a good job and not some dumb one.
>
> I enjoy writing, debating and playing sport.

Half of the Year 7 students wrote either "nothing" or left the question about possible changes to the school blank. Five students were critical of the school uniform, in particular the trackpants. Three students identified bullying as something that they would like to change.

Year 8 Students

In contrast to their Year 7 peers, almost all the Year 8 students considered that their teacher tells them when they do good work, a higher percentage than the 60 percent in the Competent Children study. Most of the Year 8 students believed that they were learning what they needed for their future. Most of the time they find their work interesting, but only a third never or hardly ever get bored. About half the children in the Competent Children at 10 study reported being bored sometimes. Four consider that they sometimes get bullied.

Their responses to what they liked best in the school were similar to those of Year 7 students, although students were more explicit about what they liked about their teachers, and about the quality of relationships they had with them and with others in the school. One student reflected the tone of many comments well by stating:

> The best thing about our school is that the teachers are always there for us when we need them. If you are a new member to our school the kids here welcome you. Our Principal is very cool. He is always there for Venture Intermediate School.

Other comments, which highlighted the positive nature of interactions that students perceive, were:

> That everything around is positive and no negativity.
>
> The school believes in you and gives you support.
>
> The teachers are supportive and good to me. They take real responsibility of my education.
>
> The best thing is that you will never be picked on.

There were 12 references to curriculum and learning, which was twice as many as those in the Year 7 survey. As the Years 7 and 8 students were from 2 different syndicates, their responses may reflect syndicate leadership and organisation more than their year group.

> . . . never go home learning nothing. U will always go home learn a brang new subject.
>
> Learning here is fun.
>
> Understanding things I didn't always know.

Half of the students made reference to friends, to playing, or to enjoying the playground. Several comments also conveyed a sense of pride in belonging to the school, as shown by this one:

> I like the reputation that our school has with our school sports, art etc.

Half of the Year 8 students suggested no changes to the school, and the only suggestion made by more than one person referred to changing the uniform. The comments from both classes suggest that students have mostly positive views of their school, their teachers, and the opportunities available to them. School is a place where they have plenty to do, where relationships are for the most part supportive and encouraging, and where they feel valued.

Teachers' Views

Profile of Teachers Who Completed Surveys

Sex	Female	15
	Male	7
Position	Classroom teacher	11
	AD/DP	2
	Senior teacher	6
	Specialist teacher	2
	Part-time teacher	
	Other (SENCO)	1
Years of teaching experience	Less than 2	3
	2–4 years	2
	5–10 years	2
	11–20 years	6
	21 plus years	9
Years at Venture Intermediate	Less than 2	7
	2–4 years	3
	5–10 years	3
	11–20 years	5
	21 plus years	4
Qualifications	Diploma of Teaching (11), Trained Teachers Certificate (1), BEd (8), Diploma of Education, BA (2), BSc (1), Higher Diploma (2), Advanced Diploma (2), Diploma Special Needs (2), Diploma Fine Arts (1)	
Membership of professional organisations	NZEI (16), Regional Reading Association (1), RTLB Association (2), PENZ (1), Interschool Sports Association (1)	

The statement which elicited most agreement from teachers referred to the importance of extra-curricular opportunities for students, with almost all teachers strongly agreeing. The other statements with highest agreement referred to staff encouragement of students, teachers' enjoyment of their work, and the significant role played by the board of trustees in supporting developments in the school.

There was also agreement for statements referring to adult learning, celebration of student success, and the availability of senior staff to discuss curriculum and teaching, as well as providing opportunities for staff to plan together. Teachers agreed that staff meetings were worthwhile, and that they were spent on important issues.

Teachers' responses to the questionnaire reflected the particular challenges they face in a low decile school. While there was strong agreement that teachers encouraged students to try their best, there was much less support for the statement that students were enthusiastic about learning, although they felt that students respected their teachers.

There was also some ambivalence about the shared beliefs and attitudes about effective teaching and learning. The staff were divided in their views about encouragement of parents to become involved in school.

As in our other case study schools, most teachers were uncertain or disagreed with the statement that "teachers regularly observe each other in the classroom and give each other feedback". Given that the intermediate timetable offers opportunities for this to occur, their views point to the fact that this is not currently part of the day-to-day culture in New Zealand schools.

Teachers were also asked to rate their levels of agreement with a range of statements about changes in the school over the last 3–4 years. Seven of the teachers had been employed at the school for less than 2 years, and three for 2–4 years, so there were several items that received "don't know" or "uncertain" ratings.

There was strong agreement that teachers now had more professional development, and that teachers had made positive changes to their teaching in the past 3–4 years. Most teachers also saw that there had been positive changes in the way the school runs. This may reflect the efforts the school has made in the last few years to invest heavily in teacher knowledge and skills.

Teachers tended to be ambivalent about whether parents now showed more interest in their children's learning.

There was disagreement about whether there was more use made of te reo Māori, with 4 teachers disagreeing and 10 teachers agreeing. This is an area that could be further explored by teachers.

In response to an item asking them to identify achievements, 8 staff made comments referring to the development of pride in the school by students, and the raising of community perceptions. These comments included:

> Greater pride installed in students about belonging to this school community.
>
> Excellent reputation throughout the local community and contributing schools.
>
> Winning lots of inter-school competitions.
>
> Decile 2 school with a zone in place.
>
> Positive image of children and staff.

Seven teachers referred to the calibre of staff, and the retention of strong staff, as significant achievements, making statements such as:

> Diversity among staff.
>
> Selecting quality staff.
>
> Maintaining high levels of staff committed to keeping standards and the culture of the school.

Staff stability.

The recruitment of positive role models in the staff.

Low staff turnover.

Teachers saw the major strengths of the school as resulting from the quality of its staff, and their shared commitment to make a difference to the life chances of the student body.

Typical comments were “quality teaching team”, “strong staff collegiality”, “teachers prepared to do extra”, “devoted staff ”, “collective of teachers with shared goal/focus”.

Nine teachers highlighted effective leadership from the principal and senior staff as particular strengths of the school. Seven teachers referred to the cultural diversity of the school and attributes of the student intake as specific assets.

Eight teachers did not identify any changes for the school. Four teachers indicated that the school “should maintain its improvement suggesting that it should keep moving with the times”, “keep current, keep changing and developing”, and “stay in the cutting edge”.

Support Staff Views

Profile of Support Staff Who Completed Surveys

Sex	Female	9
	Male	1
Position	Teacher aide	6
	Deputy librarian	1
	Office manager	1
	Office assistant	1
	Accounts assistant	1
Years at Venture Intermediate	Less than 2	3
	2–4 years	2
	5–10 years	2
	11–20 years	2
	21 plus years	1
Qualifications	Teachers Aide Certificate (1), Pitman’s typing (1), Dip General Nursing (1)	
Membership of professional organisations	SLANZA (1), NZEI (5)	

Along with teachers, support staff agreed that staff strongly encouraged students to do their best, and that teachers believed that all students could learn. They agreed that they enjoyed working at the school, and felt involved in the life of the school, although their responses indicate that communication between teachers and support staff could be strengthened. Half were uncertain whether senior staff openly recognised them when they did things well. No support staff strongly agreed that students were enthusiastic about learning, and 6 were uncertain.

Support staff were also asked about their perception of change. Three of the staff had worked at the school for less than 2 years and 2 for 2–4 years. One person had been employed at the school for over 21 years. There was strongest agreement with statements referring to positive changes in teaching practices, and to school organisation. All support staff agreed that there had been more professional development.

Along with teachers, they did not have the impression that student behaviour had improved, or that parents showed more interest in their children's learning.

They identified achievements as collegiality among staff (3), rebuilding after the fire (3), and encouragement and support of students (3). One support staff member wrote:

> . . . what I have noticed is that children have lots of encouragement and after 2 years here they leave much more confident in themselves, and very happy smiling children. It's great.

They identified school strengths as primarily those of the quality of staff and management (6), by comments such as "dedication of the principal and staff", "unity and respect with the staff", and "good direction from senior staff and staff".

Four of the support staff referred to the standard of the school uniform as an area where there could be improvements in the future.

Summary

Venture Intermediate is an example of a low decile school that in the past failed to offer high-quality education, but which then turned around, and has continued to sustain its improvements over time. Immediate and up-front action was the change strategy that was employed, and the principal used the perceived crisis of threatened recapitation to break through the school's inertia and drive change. He also built on the very real but under-utilised strengths of existing teachers, and created a well-functioning team. Having reversed the decline, the school then moved on to develop entrepreneurial and creative responses to its particular educational context.

It has been well governed by a stable board of trustees, which takes an active interest in the school, and is strongly supportive and trusting of the principal and staff.

The school takes a strategic approach to school governance and management. School reviews help to identify school needs and establish priorities and future directions.

This school has invested considerable time and resources in teacher development. In line with government priorities, the major emphasis has been on strengthening teacher knowledge and expertise in the teaching of literacy, and the integration of literacy skills in other curriculum areas. This emphasis has meant that there is less new development that can be done in other curriculum areas. Where ongoing relevant professional development is not continued in these areas, they will be given less attention. The experience in this and other schools also illustrates that a potentially valuable teacher resource for teaching science is not being used, because it was sent to schools without professional development.

Many of the staff have taught at the school for long periods, but in recent years the school has sought to recruit a younger and more diverse mix of staff. The ethos of the school is strongly positive, with the clear expectation that staff are there to enhance the learning opportunities of the students. While teachers and staff are extremely positive about working in this school, and support for teachers by senior staff is frequently strong, their roles are particularly challenging.

There is a strong emphasis on extra-curricular and co-curricular activities, which engage and challenge the students. This could leave less time for teaching, or result in additional hours after work spent on planning. Either way, there are risks for student learning or for teacher burnout. While the school has had a core of stable staff, increased external demands on teachers for higher standards of teaching, together with professional development activities, create pressures on teachers.

It is not clear what the next challenges will be for this school. It enjoys a good reputation and is serving its community well. Continuity and change are themes in all schools; the school appears dedicated to continual improvement and renewal, and no obvious changes seem imminent.

Table 42

Year 7 Students' Views of Their Experience at School (n=28)

School is a place where	Mostly	Sometimes	Never/hardly ever	No response
I have good friends	27	1		
Teachers treat me fairly	23	5		
Teachers help me to improve my work	22	6		
I enjoy myself	22	6		
I like my teachers	21	7		
The rules are fair	21	7		
I feel safe in the playground	20	8		
Teachers listen to what I say	19	9		
My teacher tells me when I do good work	18	10		
I get all the help I need	17	11		
I keep out of trouble	16	12		
Teachers explain things clearly to me	16	12		
I do interesting things	13	15		
I can learn what I need for the future	13	15		
I could do better work if I tried	12	16		
I learn most things pretty quickly	11	17		
Students behave well in class	9	19		
I get bored	2	19	7	
I get bullied	1	3	24	
I get upset	1	6	21	
I get a hard time	1	7	20	
I feel restless	1	14	13	
I get tired of trying	1	16	11	
I feel lonely		4	23	1

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Table 43

Year 8 Students' Views of Their Experience at School (n=24)

School is a place where	Mostly	Sometimes	Never/hardly ever	No response
My teacher tells me when I do good work	21	2	1	
Teachers help me to improve my work	21	3		
I have good friends	21	3		
I feel safe in the playground	18	4	1	1
I can learn what I need for the future	18	6		
Teachers treat me fairly	18	6		
I like my teachers	16	8		
I do interesting things	15	8	1	
I enjoy myself	15	8	1	
Teachers explain things clearly to me	15	9		
The rules are fair	14	8	1	1
I learn most things pretty quickly	13	9	2	
I get all the help I need	12	12		
I could do better work if I tried	11	10	2	1
Teachers listen to what I say	11	10	2	1
I keep out of trouble	9	14	1	
I get tired of trying	5	9	10	
Students behave well in class	5	19		
I get bored	3	13	7	1
I feel lonely	1	4	18	1
I feel restless		13	11	
I get a hard time		7	17	
I get upset		7	17	
I get bullied		4	20	

Table 44

Teachers' Views of Their School (n=22)

The school now	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	No response
Extra-curricular activities provide valuable opportunities for all students	21	1			
Staff encourage students to try their best					
Teachers like working in the school	18	4			
The board of trustees plays a significant role in supporting developments within the school	18	4			
Adults (teachers) as well as students learn in this school	15	5		1	1
Student success is regularly celebrated in this school	15	6	1		
Senior staff are available to discuss curriculum/teaching matters	14	6	2		
The school allows staff joint planning time	13	7	1		1
The primary concern of everyone in the school is student learning	13	8	1		
The senior staff communicate a clear vision of where the school is going	13	7	1	1	
Staff development time is used effectively in the school	13	7	1	1	
Staff in this school work hard to promote and maintain good relations with the community	12	9	1		
New staff are well supported in this school	12	5	5		
Whole school meetings are worthwhile	11	9	1		1
There is mutual respect between staff and senior staff in this school	11	9	1		1
If staff have a problem with their teaching they usually turn to colleagues for help	11	9	2		
At staff meetings time is spent on important things rather than on minor issues	11	11			
Teachers in this school believe that all students can learn	11	10	1		
Students are clear about standards of behaviour expected in the school	11	10	1		
Teachers regularly discuss ways of improving students' learning	10	12			
Teachers believe that all children can be successful	10	11			1
Staff feel encouraged to bring forward new ideas	10	11	1		1
Expectations about school work are communicated clearly to all students	10	11	1		
Teachers regularly collaborate to plan their teaching	10	9	2	1	
Every attempt is made to set challenging standards of achievement for each student	10	10	2		
Staff have a commitment to the whole school and not just their class or syndicate	10	11		1	
Decision-making processes are fair	9	10	3		
Staff ensure that students receive constructive feedback about their work	9	11	1	1	
Teachers respect students	9	13			
Teachers have a say in topics selected for the school's staff development programme	9	10	2	1	
Teachers regularly monitor the learning and progress of individual children	9	13			
Students' work is prominently displayed	9	12	1		
There is effective communication between senior staff and teachers	7	11	3	1	
Staff participate in important decision making	7	12	2	1	
Teachers have a say in the school strategic plan	7	9	5		1
Non-teaching staff feel involved in the life of the school	7	11	3		1
There is regular staff discussion about how to achieve school goals and targets	7	14	1		
There is effective communication among teachers	6	14	2		
Teachers encourage students to be independent learners	6	14	2		
Parents are clear about behaviour standards expected in school	6	15	1		

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The school now	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	No response
Standards set for students are consistently upheld across the school	6	13	1	1	1
Disruption in classes is dealt with promptly so that learning for all students can proceed	6	14	2		
The school communicates clearly to parents the standard of work it expects from students	5	14	3		
Senior staff openly recognise teachers when they do things well	5	14	2	1	
Students in this school are enthusiastic about learning	4	10	7	1	
Teachers share similar beliefs and attitudes about effective teaching/learning	4	13	5		
Non-teaching staff have input into the school strategic plan	4	8	9	1	
The staff encourage parents to be involved in the school	4	10	5	3	
The school development plan includes practical ways of evaluating success in achieving goals and targets	4	16	1		1
Students respect teachers	3	18			1
Teachers regularly observe each other in the classroom and give each other feedback	3	5	9	5	
Teachers pay attention to keeping the school environment attractive	2	14	5	1	
Students have some say in the school strategic plan		4	11	7	

Table 45

Teachers' Views of Change Over the Last 3–4 Years (n=22)

Change over the last 3-4 years	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Don't know	No response
We monitor our progress more	8	6	2		5	1
We have made positive changes to how we plan ahead	9	5	3		5	
We have made positive changes to the way we teach	11	5			4	2
We expect more of our students	6	8	3	1	4	
We make more use of te reo Māori	3	7	3	4	4	1
We have more professional development	16	2			4	
We acknowledge children's cultures more	9	6	2		4	1
Student behaviour has improved	5	9	4		4	
We have more contact with other schools	4	8	2	2	4	2
We enjoy our work more	5	9	5		3	
We have made positive changes to the way the school runs	15	4			3	
Parents show more interest in their children's learning	4	5	6	3	3	1

Table 46

Support Staff Views of Their School (n=10)

The school now	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	No response
Staff encourage students to try their very best	6	4			
Teachers in this school believe that all students can learn	6	4			
The primary concern of everyone in the school is student learning	5	5			
Adults as well as students learn in this school	5	4	1		
The board of trustees plays a significant role in supporting developments with the school	5	4	1		
Whole school meetings are worthwhile	4	5	1		
Student success is regularly celebrated in this school	4	6			
Staff in this school work hard to promote and maintain good relations with the community	3	6	1		
Teachers believe that all children can be successful	3	5	2		
There is mutual respect between staff and senior staff in this school	3	6	1		
Support staff like working in this school	3	6	1		
Staff have a commitment to the whole school and not just their class or syndicate	3	5	2		
Teachers in this school believe that all students can be successful	3	6	1		
Students' work is prominently displayed	3	6	1		
The staff encourage parents to be involved in the school	3	6	1		
Students are clear about standards of behaviour expected in the school	3	7			
Extra-curricular activities provide valuable opportunities for all students	3	7			
Decision-making processes are fair	2	7	1		
Students respect staff	2	5	2	1	
Teachers respect students	2	7	1		
New staff are well supported in this school	2	8			
Staff feel encouraged to bring forward new ideas	2	8			
There is effective communication between teachers and support staff	2	5	2	1	
Staff participate in important decision making	2	5	3		
Staff development time is used effectively in the school	2	5	3		
The school communicates clearly to parents the standard of work it expects from students	2	4	3		1
At staff meetings time is spent on important things rather than on minor issues	2	5	1		2
There is regular staff discussion about how to achieve school goals/targets	2	4	4		
Support staff have input into the school strategic plan	2	5	1	2	
Disruption in classes is dealt with promptly so that learning for all students can proceed	2	4	3		1
The school development plan includes practical ways of evaluating success in achieving goals and targets	2	5	3		
There is effective communication among staff	1	6	2		1
The senior staff communicate a clear vision of where the school is going	1	8	1		
Parents are clear about behaviour standards expected in the school	1	6	3		
Staff pay attention to keeping the school environment attractive	1	5	4		
Support staff feel involved in the life of the school	1	5		1	3
Standards set for students are consistently upheld across the school	1	5	2	2	
Senior staff openly recognise support staff when they do things well	1	4	5		
Students in this school are enthusiastic about learning		4	6		

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Table 47

Support Staff Views of Changes in the Last 3–4 Years (n=10)

Change over the last 3–4 years	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	No response
We have made positive changes to how we plan ahead	1	4			5
We make more use of te reo Māori	2	1	2		5
We have more professional development	3	3			4
We monitor our progress more	2	3	1		4
We enjoy our work more	1	4	1		4
Parents show more interest in their children's learning		3	3		4
We have more contact with other schools		5	1		4
We expect more of our students	1	4	2		3
We have made positive changes to the way we teach	3	4			3
We have made positive changes to the way the school runs	3	4	1		2
We acknowledge children's cultures more	3	4	1		2
Student behaviour has improved	2	1	5		2

VILLA SCHOOL

Introduction

Villa School Profile

School type	Contributing primary	
Roll size	230	
Decile rating	9	
Locality	Suburban	
Student ethnicity	Pākehā	– 80%
	Māori	– 13%
	Asian	– 4%
	Pasifika	– 2%
Staffing entitlement	12.7	
Actual staffing	12 full-time, 1 part-time	
Recommended	By Ministry of Education as a school that had shown considerable improvement in a short time.	

Villa School is located near the city hospital in a large provincial city. Most of the students come from a close geographical enrolment zone, have once lived in the area, or have parents who work at the hospital. The area is seen as a desirable part of town in which to live.

The school is architecturally interesting and visually attractive. All of the buildings have been extensively remodelled, and the main block resembles a large colonial villa. There are large grassed playing areas, with a well-designed adventure playground and a fitness trail. The grounds are used by the community after school hours.

The staff currently consists of a principal, 11 full-time teachers, including teaching deputy and associate principals, one part-time teacher, an office manager and office assistant, 8 teacher aides, a resource assistant, a cleaner, and a caretaker.

The school roll started at around 230 at the beginning of 2001, and grew to about 300 by the end of the year. Nearly 38 percent of the roll is made up of children who live closer to other schools, but whose parents have chosen this school. There are very few transient children. While the roll has increased in the past few years, the school has managed the pressure on the roll by having a relatively small zone.

Last year the school hosted a group of fee-paying Korean students for one term. The voluntary school donation is $60 a child ($120 a family), and there is also a $32 activity fee which covers the cost of school trips.

We chose this school on the recommendation of contacts in the Ministry of Education, who considered that it was an example of a school that had shown considerable improvement in a short period of time. In 1998, student education had been identified by ERO as being at risk. By 2000, the school's achievements were such that it won a national award for its academic progress, relationships with the community, teacher involvement, and budget management.

The school is now one of 5 Apple Education Reference site schools in New Zealand. It is the only lead school in the Manawatu delivering an Information and Communication Technologies Professional Development Contract, co–ordinating professional development in ICT for 13 schools.

Expectations for students' behaviour and achievement are high. A description of the school on its website states that "with children generally well-behaved and interested, teachers are free to teach". Parents are actively interested in the school and there are many opportunities for them to participate in school activities.

We interviewed the principal, board of trustees chair, office manager, teaching associate principal and teaching deputy principal, team leader of the junior classes, and ICTPD co-ordinator, a provisionally registered teacher with responsibility for the science curriculum, a group of 3 teachers, and a group of 4 parents.

Background

Villa school was established in 1929, and according to parents, it has generally had a good reputation. However, in May 1998, the incoming board of trustees was "shocked" by a very critical ERO report that received significant attention from the media, and had an immediate impact on roll numbers. The report identified longstanding and unaddressed deficiencies in school management: there were no formal management systems, including a school scheme, and no curriculum policies, which resulted in no formal direction or guidance for teachers. The ERO report asserted that the school functioned as 3 separate teams, with different operational styles and separate budgets, creating a lack of consistency across the school. The previous board of trustees had invested considerable effort in upgrading the school buildings, but none of the recommendations for school management promoted in the 1994 ERO Assurance Audit had been implemented. ERO acknowledged that staff and teachers were working hard, but people who remembered the school at the time told us that although this was the case, there was no collective sense of responsibility for the school. "We weren't accountable to anyone, just to our inner selves," reported one teacher.

The current principal was appointed towards the end of 1998. By the time the follow-up Discretionary Review was held in June 1999, ERO reported that "the serious situation which previously prevailed has been capably turned around". ERO attributed the "tremendous change accomplished" to four significant factors, namely:

- strong and effective leadership and school management;
- an empowered board of trustees;
- positive school tone;
- collegial climate amongst staff—the school-wide sense of success and enjoyment.

Indicators of the improvements that had occurred since the appointment of the principal were, according to the review:

- Extensive training and development programmes for the board of trustees, which resulted in "an environment of trust and integrity where dynamic relationships have developed and flourish".
- Sound governance and management policies and practices for curriculum, employment, finance, and property.
- Inclusive and collaborative style of principal leadership.
- A focus on school-wide self review.
- Rigorous performance management linked to staff professional development.
- A focus on student responsibility and active learning.
- Strengthening of curriculum delivery and assessment.
- Targeted responses to students' learning needs.

These are significant achievements in a little over 6 months. This case study details how they were achieved, and what has happened since in the school, and discusses the applicability of lessons learned in this school to other contexts.

The Turn-around

There was unanimous agreement that the catalyst for change in this school was the appointment of a new principal, who began his teaching career in 1990. He had a reputation as a successful change agent with his previous school, also acknowledged as a high-performing school by a national education award. He said that he applied for the position of principal at this school because he was a "fix-it man" who, it was known, would "stand no nonsense". The opportunity to turn this school around was the sort of challenge that he relished. "I go in and I sort out a problem and I like moving on."

He was ably assisted by a newly elected board of trustees, described by our interviewees as "educationally informed", "fantastic", with "knowledge and expertise in their own fields". The principal also credited the board of trustees with being "wonderful, critical friends for me".

On his appointment, the teachers, knowing the reputation of their new principal, expected change. The first challenge was to break down the "schools within a school" way of working:

> When I came in there were two schools, each with its own budget. Books were stamped with the part of the school they belonged to. Staff didn't sit together in the staffroom. (principal)

A new start was signalled by asking teachers which level of the school they wanted to teach and with whom they wanted to work. This resulted in most teachers being required to move from their classrooms to a different room.

Central resource areas were established, as were school-wide curriculum budgets. Teachers were each allocated $600 to buy consumables for their own classrooms.

This was an extremely visible and demanding style of leadership, which evoked a range of responses from teachers. According to the principal, "some staff who had become despondent bounced back: They needed recognition and encouragement." Not all teachers responded positively to the changes. Only 3 staff remain since his appointment, although another 2 were on leave at the time of our visit, and have since returned to the school.

Things were done very differently:

> I look them to Taupo to my bach for a two day-retreat. I got in a motivational speaker. I require professional development in the holidays, but we'll go to the beach.

A teacher who was employed when the principal was appointed told us that it was "an eye-opener personally in what a difference a leader can make", and another said that "he made us feel valued. There was lots of talking to the community, questionnaires, talking to the whole staff, senior meetings, giving us roles. Ensuring they don't overlap, so roles don't clash."

"Non-performing teachers left", according to one teacher, sometimes because of competency proceedings. The current staff is now described as "young and enthusiastic" and willing to fully commit to high performance expectations. One teacher told us, "In some ways he loved this challenge. He could start from scratch. Some times he comes down hard. Other times he gives us that leeway."

Teachers no longer work in isolation, shut off from their colleagues.

> [The principal] has let us work together by co-ordinating the different ideas within the school and supporting what is going on. And doing the work in the background to make sure. That what is collaboratively decided on happens, and is seen through to its end. (teacher)

During our time in the school, the high energy levels of staff and children were evident. Despite the visit coinciding with the 11 September terrorist incidents in the USA, the television in the staffroom played for most of the time to an empty room during lunchtime. Teachers were with children, taking sports, choir, or other activities. During our visit, students were participating in their local performing arts festival, "small black" rugby, and a farewell assembly for the Korean students, as well as their regular school programme. The choir came to morning tea one morning and sang for the staff and visitors. Both the children and the young teachers who taught the choir were warmly acknowledged by the principal and other staff.

The factors that we identified as important in the improvements in this school echo those identified by ERO. These are:

- strong school governance;
- leadership;
- professional development;
- curriculum and assessment;
- community relationships.

Strong School Governance

Many of the people we interviewed acknowledged the capabilities of the board of trustees. They identified a strong board of trustees chair/principal relationship, and this was also commented on by the principal and the board chair. The principal and the chair previously worked together on school management projects at the local university. She meets with the principal weekly during school hours, so that she is visible to staff. However, "He doesn't burden me with stuff I don't need to know. He keeps stuff where it's meant to be." This is a board which appears to be very clear about its role, and which has the internal capacity to be fully involved in the strategic direction of the school, and to ensure that the school is resourced to allow initiatives to be funded.

In appointing the principal, the board sought a person who had the background and skills to unify the previously divisive school, and who would promote a focus on innovation, leading to quality education. "So what's this going to mean for learning and teaching?" is the question that the board considers as most important.

During the first year of the principal's appointment, the principal and the board chair drafted the policies which direct the school's practices, and worked with the community and staff to ensure that they reflected a common view. Policies are now drafted by a sub-committee, the principal, or trustee, shared with staff and parents, and returned to the board. They are seen as living documents, which change as circumstances change.

The board chair considers that the school had a good staff who were "just waiting to be taken by the hand and encouraged to fly". She believes that changes were able to happen quickly because "the staff were responsive, the children were 'nice kids' and parents were on-side".

In her view, the role of a board of trustees is to have a clear appreciation of the "big picture" of the school, to have a clear vision of school direction, and to be able to budget strategically to achieve school goals.

As well, she believes that the board should trust the principal and support the staff. Several staff told us that the board of trustees members had high visibility with the school, attended social functions, and were welcome in classrooms. Teachers feel supported and encouraged. They mentioned that they are personally acknowledged for their efforts, and cared for at times of personal need.

Unlike many boards, this board of trustees is prepared to take an active role in examining the quality of learning and teaching in the school. While supportive, the board expects evidence-based rationales for new initiatives. Not all board members were initially convinced about the proposal to invest heavily in ICT, and the board chair described how one board member "played the devil's advocate for ICT, questioned constantly, made you justify what you wanted".

Staff regularly attend board of trustees meetings to provide informal information about what is happening in the school. For example, a teacher talked about the development in the arts curriculum, what she is trying to achieve, what the costs are, and what it will look like in practice. They see it as crucial to "constantly educate the board about how schools work". The board is genuinely interested in issues such as assessment, and not just for accountability purposes. At a recent meeting, the staff representative on the board explained how teachers plan, and how this connects with assessment. She then showed how this connects with whole school planning and programmes, and illustrated this by showing portfolios from classrooms.

At the heart of the good relationship between the school and the board is the mutual trust that has been built up between them. Trust allows for honesty and genuine communication, and creates the climate for mutual learning and development.

Leadership

The leadership qualities of the new principal have clearly been crucial to the improvements in this school. He was employed because of his reputation as a change agent, and he brought this experience and expertise to the position. One parent told us, "When [the principal] arrived he had a clear idea of where he wanted to go, how to get there and the skills that were required."

These qualities include the ability to think strategically and systematically, and to use data to inform decisions. He is very focused in his approach. He described himself as "optimistic and opportunistic", and he is able to turn situations to his advantage. For example, the school accepted the bulk funding of teachers' salaries option, and found the extra money to be very welcome, but when this was no longer an option, it looked for other sources of additional income and entered into national awards. "We made good use of it (bulk funding). When it went we weren't going to waste any time whingeing."

Staff are encouraged and rewarded for showing initiative. Management salary units are advertised internally, after staff have agreed with the allocation, and can be won by any teacher. Investment in staff learning is promoted and encouraged, and several staff talked about being pushed out of their "comfort zones" to try new things. The principal seeks to build what he describes as "a leaderful school", and staff are encouraged to accept invitations to lecture at the college of education, or work as advisers to schools, even though this will impact on staffing. The principal considers this to be one way that teachers can experience the benefits of a sabbatical. They return re-energised, bringing new skills and a broader perspective with them. During the time that they are away, the principal believes that the school benefits from the freshness and vitality provided by long-term relieving teachers, who are also mentored to assist them to act as mentors for the staff in their teams, and to encourage others to develop leadership.

Children are also encouraged to take leadership roles. Older and younger class levels are paired as "buddy classes" to enable older children to act as leaders and mentors, and to create links across the school. Weekly school assemblies are the responsibility of rostered classes, who are expected to complete the programme, collect and present the in-class awards, present the "best class" assembly award, and select the Principal's Award recipient. Such responsibilities are intended both to celebrate children's achievements and to foster leadership skills.

Considerable attention is devoted to building well-functioning teams, and to "holding the staff together". "Working hard and playing hard" contributes to a sense of unity and enjoyment. The principal promotes informality, and encourages the use of first names. Many children address him by his first name, and they can use his office for teleconferences, as well as his computer. Staff meetings are optional, although in practice it is unlikely that staff would fail to attend. The principal made this decision because he did not want to "treat staff like children", believing that they should not have to ask for permission if they had a pressing commitment.

Most people we interviewed described his enthusiasm for learning, optimism, openness, organisational skills, willingness to listen to new ideas, and personal support. One senior teacher contrasted his support with what she received previously: "In the past I had an incompetent teacher but I got no support. With [the principal], you know the support is there, and with the new BOT as well."

Professional Development

This school sees its responsibility as fostering learning in staff and students. "Our job is to teach more than the children." (principal) Professional development is seen as critically important to school development. The board of trustees chair described professional development as being both the driver and the result of change. The winning of two Ministry contracts has allowed the board of trustees to fund professional development at a high level.

Features of professional development in this school include staff retreats, whole school professional development, and school trips for staff. Two-day staff retreats are held at the beginning of each school year at a beach, to allow for uninterrupted discussion, planning, and team building.

The school year is also extended by 2 days to allow the entire staff to take 2 days to visit other "leading schools" in other parts of the country. Last year the staff had a tour to Taupo, Tauranga, and Rotorua, and gained much from the opportunity to see and discuss the practices they observed.

The board and principal are cautious about involvement in other professional development opportunities, believing that in most cases, only professional development which involves the entire staff has the power to actually impact on classroom practice. Individual needs are funded where there is an identified need.

The school's professional development in ICT is seen by the principal and board chair as an example of the effectiveness of its approach to teacher learning, and subsequent translation into classroom practice.

Data collected at the end of 1999 indicated that the use of ICT within the school was patchy and uneven. The available hardware was outmoded and unreliable, and was used primarily for word processing. It was decided to focus on the purchase of hardware, and to support more dynamic use of ICT by developing teacher expertise. All teachers were offered the opportunity to purchase personal computers at a reduced cost, with the option of paying for them with their additional payments as associate teachers to teacher education students.

In 2000, whole school professional development in ICT was introduced. The programme was divided into 8 4-week cycles. This began with initial sessions to increase teachers' own knowledge and confidence, followed by in-class tutoring sessions to transfer skills learnt to their classrooms. In-class observation and support were built into the programme to allow for feedback and troubleshooting. Teachers also collected examples of their own ICT work to construct personal portfolios of their progress.

According to the May 2000 ICT Achievement Report by the ICT Co-ordinator to the board of trustees, teachers learnt how to:

- use the digital camera, scanner, floppy and zip drive;
- insert pictures into AppleWorks;
- work with Hyperstudio;
- create slide shows;
- use teaching and management strategies for ICT in their classrooms.

In his view, teachers were using ICT in authentic ways as part of their classroom programmes of education. According to a school report:

> Children became publishers in the digital era. Printers came out of rooms and the school network printer became something used very sparingly. Children used the datashow to show their work to the school as an audience and the class website pages began being "hit" by parents and relatives around the world. This focus on using the computer as a presenting tool meant that children learnt about making slide shows, multi-media presentations, expressing themselves digitally when this was the best and most authentic way to do so.

The school is now recognised as a leader in the ICT area. A teacher has been released for 3 years, through funding from the ICT PD lead school contract, to work with 13 other local schools on how to use ICT to support meaningful classroom learning. Staff development in ICT professional development is ongoing.

The board of trustees has also invested significantly in professional development for teachers' aides, who are all funded to study for teacher-aide certificates at the local university. As teacher aides are employed from within the local area, the board sees this as part of their commitment to "educating the community".

Curriculum and Assessment

Curriculum is viewed broadly in this school, rather than as a prescription for what should be taught. The school conceptualises its educational goals in terms of assisting students to:

- make a positive contribution to society;
- contribute to the sustainability of life on Planet Earth;
- gain satisfying employment and live a rewarding personal life.

In the process students are encouraged to respect others and learn how to build supportive relationships, engage in the arts as a performer and observer, and learn to access and use information critically. The process of learning is considered to be more important than the content. Essential skills are embodied with the curriculum. "We don't focus on coverage of the curriculum. We don't care if they do spiders five years in a row. It is the processes and the level of inquiry that are important" (principal).

Teachers used phrases such as "teaching children how to learn", "action learning", "understanding the inquiry process", "independence", "goal setting", "risk taking", and "higher order thinking" when talking about teaching. Their participation in a school-wide Infolink course has strengthened their knowledge of the learning process, and developed their knowledge of strategies to teach children to access, use, and evaluate information thoughtfully.

Children are encouraged to solve real-world problems in context, and to communicate their knowledge and findings to others in a range of ways. Information and Communication Technologies are promoted because they provide effective ways to investigate information, show relationships between ideas, and engage in meaningful learning. ICT also provides opportunities for children to work together collaboratively to share ideas, discuss and challenge each other's thinking, and work toward common goals. In all classrooms, children's investigations and solutions were evident, and their work was of a high standard and purposeful.

Priority is given to student achievement in literacy. The "four Rs" are wRiting, aRts, aRithmetic, and Reading. A high proportion of children across the school are reading at or above their chronological age. Five teachers are members of the executive of the local Reading Association, and work together to improve literacy levels, particularly the teaching of spelling, which they consider is not addressed in the English in the New Zealand Curriculum document.

The school has a pragmatic and informed approach to assessment. The main purposes of assessment are to improve the quality of learning and teaching within the school, and to inform parents. New entrants' progress is surveyed by using a school-designed process after a month at school, rather than by using School Entry Assessment (SEA). Progress is assessed at 6 years of age on the 6 year net. Parents are invited to discuss the results.

Regular monitoring of children's progress is carried out, with a focus on informal feedback. Teachers are encouraged to record only what they consider they will use or have a conceivable need to use. The emphasis is on the quality of assessment, rather than the quantity. It is seen as the professional decision of teams to decide what learning outcomes they choose to assess, and "to allow for personal style, personal flair".

Teachers also keep assessment records which will assist children's transition to their next teacher, although "the amount of summative assessment is absolutely minimal" (principal). A cumulative record is compiled for each child; it notes special programmes and services, special achievements and interests, 6 year net, running record results over time, spelling level progress, S.T.A.R. results, English, basic facts, and numeracy.

"Essentials for living" are also assessed at each year. These comprise:

- *A passion for living,* which includes:
  - *respect* for themselves, others, older people, property, environment, and other cultures;
    self esteem;
    optimism;

  - independence (able to take care of themselves and their things, time management, self motivation, goal setting and reflecting, resourcefulness, self protection, ability to use leisure time).
- *A desire to learn,* which includes:
  - knowing how to learn (able to investigate, communicate, solve problems and take action, find resources, create or recreate);
  - enjoying learning/experiencing success, curious.
- *Ability to get along,* which includes:
  - able to work as a team;
  - able to lead;
  - able to be part of the community.

The school also collects data which allows it to report to the board of trustees in Terms 1 and 4 on student progress, to identify areas for development, and to give results of previous interventions. Reports are written in a clear, direct, and straightforward way. For example, in the Term 1, 2000 report on Number in the New Zealand Curriculum, the report briefly explained curriculum expectations for each age group, explained what data was collected and how it was collected, identified what was found out, compared these results with the 1999 achievement report, and made recommendations for future improvements.

In contrast to many schools, this school does not use any automated record systems. The principal explained that "It reduces your staff to mechanics. Stuff that's easy to record is stuff that shouldn't be recorded." Initially, this approach did not convince ERO. The principal and the board chair told us that the ERO reviewers told the school that they could not see any consistent assessment. "So we took them to the rooms and showed them. They hadn't asked the right questions."

The school also reports to parents using report forms which report literacy (reading, writing, oral), numeracy, special achievements and special programmes, social and co-operative skills, attendance, punctuality, and behaviour, as well as general comments. Reading and numeracy are reported against level (below, at, above) and progress (concern, satisfactory, pleasing).

At mid-year, timetabled parent/teacher meetings ("portfolio chats") are held to discuss children's progress, based on their personal portfolios. These show samples of children's work in a range of curriculum areas. Each sample is annotated to explain the purpose of the work and what was achieved, and the child and teacher comment on it. Portfolios are sent home and returned to school at the end of each term. They are lively and personal records of children's progress, which include digital photographs, "before" and "after" views in science, test results, and other artefacts. There were mixed teacher views about the value of the portfolios, however, as they are seen as costly in terms of teacher time.

Overall, it appears that the school collects sufficient assessment data to address learning and teaching needs, and to satisfy accountability requirements. A focus on teaching and learning, rather than a preoccupation with assessment, perhaps reflects the confidence the school feels in its programmes, as well as the ability to advocate for the wisdom of its decisions.

Community Relationships

Relationships with the community are positive and amiable. Parents spoke warmly about ways in which the school had improved in the past 3 years, and how they now felt much more included and listened to than in the past. They considered that the school was more friendly and open to parents. They said that the principal's door was "always open". The principal also has regular information sessions where parents are invited for a cup of tea and the opportunity to raise any issues, or learn about how to help their children at home (for example, how to assist them to choose library books).

These sessions are held at different times of the day to cater for different parental timetables, and parents said that "those who can come get a lot out of it".

There are weekly school newsletters which can also be accessed on the school's website, and parent-teacher interviews. One parent told us that staff were always "willing to do the extra bit", and that on one occasion the teacher came to her home for a parent interview.

There is a core of parents who are available to help out in the school. "If you are a parent who has the time and interest, there are many opportunities." (parent) However, as many parents are in paid employment, not many are available for regular parental help.

The school has an active Parent Teacher Association, which supports the school by co-ordinating special projects (e.g., sun hats for all of the children), as well as fund-raising. In 2001, $31,000 was raised for the school through its efforts.

Next door to the school is a rest home for the elderly, and children regularly visit the home to read, conduct research, and perform for the residents. One resident regularly visits the school to read to children.

There is a structured transition to school programme, which includes full information for parents (on the school website and in printed form), and introductory visits to classrooms. Once a term, "parent transition meetings" are held. Parents of children starting that term are introduced to the teachers, and learn about school learning approaches, and how they can best support their children.

All 4-year-olds who have pre-enrolled at the school are invited to attend a weekly library class for 45 minutes, run by the associate principal. Typically, 10–12 children and their caregivers attend. The programme aims to provide the children with an enjoyable literacy experience, as well as a chance to take a library book home. The sessions include shared book, word, and letter study, a poem, and a focus activity, such as a letter-sound treasure hunt. Some children have attended regularly for up to 30 weeks before school entry, and they begin school with some alphabet knowledge and a sight vocabulary of up to 30 words. In the session we observed, some children were confidently able to construct simple sentences using their word cards.

The associate principal noted that apart from academic benefits, the programme is supported by parents, because it allows children who attend different early childhood groups to get to know each other, and this makes the transition to school easier. It also models for parents activities that they can do at home with their children.

The school seeks to create and develop links with the wider educational community. This includes hosting and organising courses for local teachers, and releasing the principal to run national courses for the New Zealand Principal and Leadership Centre.

Students' Views of their Experiences at School

Year 4 Students

In contrast with the older students, nearly all of the 27 Year 4 children surveyed considered that they mostly tried hard, with 10 saying that they mostly liked their work. They "mostly" liked school (20), and mostly felt that they belonged (22). Most of the children (24) considered that their classmates behaved well sometimes.

Teachers were identified by 9 children as what they like best about the school, making comments such as, "all the teachers in the school are nice and kind to us", and "the teacher—the way we are teach". Three students identified the principal: "The Principal is nis", "the princeable". Friends (6) and playing in the playground (8) were mentioned also. One student only specified identified curriculum, highlighting maths, art, and books as what he liked best.

One student reported that he liked the fact that, "It is the best medium sized school in New Zealand." Another said "That it doesn't matter who you play with or what you do because there's something for everyone."

Almost half the children (12) said that they would not change anything about the school. Eleven suggestions were made, mostly about improving the grounds including "a bigger and warmer swimming pool", "new sandpit". Two children suggested different lunch hours for juniors and seniors.

Year 6 Students

The responses of the 26 Year 6 students surveyed confirmed our impressions that teachers are fully committed to students and their learning. The items most agreed with tend to relate to positive statements about teachers, who they perceive as acknowledging student efforts, helpful, and fair.

They are more critical of their own efforts, with the majority (24) considering that they could usually or sometimes do better work if they tried.

Only 5 students reported that they never or hardly ever got bored.

Bullying is still perceived as an issue at times for a third of the children.

Students were very positive in their comments about what they liked about the school. Eleven students identified teachers as being what they like best, making comments such as:

> The teachers are very nice.
>
> Teachers are caring and kind.
>
> They have good teachers.

Students also commented favourably about teaching methods, including statements such as:

> I get told what I need to improve on.
>
> The way things are taught is good.
>
> We learn lots and achieve things and if we don't finish we have to do it in our own time even if we are away.
>
> They try everything to help me.

There were 17 positive comments referring to school work, with art receiving 5 mentions.

Affective aspects of the school were also seen as strengths. Students made comments such as:

> The rules are fair and everyone is nice to everyone else.
>
> People trust each other.

In response to what they would like to change, 8 students either wrote "nothing" or left this section blank. Ten suggestions referred to improvements in the playground, including "a path from [the] street to the school, more water fountains, bigger playground, bigger school, soccer goals, more gardens". Three students suggested that the school include an intermediate section, with one student advising "Make it into an intermediate so I don't have to leave."

Teachers' Views

Profile of Teachers Who Completed Surveys

Sex	Female	11
Position	Classroom teacher	7
	Senior teacher	1
	AD/DP	1
	Part-time teacher	2
Years of teaching experience	Less than 2	2
	2–4 years	2
	5–10 years	5
	11–20 years	
	21 plus years	2

Years at Villa School	Less than 2	6
	2–4 years	4
	5–10 years	1
	11–20 years	
	21 plus years	
Qualifications	In addition to Diploma of Teaching, teachers had other qualifications as follows: Bachelor of Education (4), 2/3rds of BEd (2), BA (2), Higher Diploma of Teaching, BSc	
Membership of professional organisations	NZEI (6), NZ Reading Association (2), AP/DP committee	

Twelve teachers completed the survey (one of these did not complete background information above).

Teachers were positive about most of the items we asked them about. The items that more than half the teachers strongly agreed with, and there was no uncertainty about, concerned recognition, promotion, and monitoring of student work, relations with the community, the role of the board, and the school environment. They were:

- Students' work is prominently displayed.
- Staff encourage students to try their best.
- Student success is regularly celebrated in the school.
- Staff in this school work hard to promote and maintain good relations with the community.
- Teachers regularly monitor the learning and progress of individual children.
- Teachers pay attention to keeping the school environment attractive.
- The board of trustees plays a significant role in supporting developments within the school.

Most teachers disagreed or were uncertain that they were able to regularly observe each other in the classroom and give each other feedback. Most were uncertain about whether non-teaching staff and students have input into the strategic plan.

Half of the responses were in the "don't know" category, which is not surprising, given that 6 teachers have been at the school less than 2 years, and 5 for between 2 and 4 years. Only one staff member had been at the school for more than 5 years.

There was strongest agreement that there is now more professional development, and that positive changes have been made to how the school runs, plans ahead, and "the way we teach".

Only 3 teachers strongly agreed that they enjoyed their work more now. There were variable views, ranging from strong agreement to disagreement, on the item, "We acknowledge children's culture more now", and over half of those who responded disagreed that "We make more use of te reo Māori".

Improvements in leadership, school-wide systems, and professional development were identified as achievements over the last 3–4 years.

Teachers identified the enthusiasm, commitment, and talents of staff, effective leadership, and curriculum strengths in ICT, the arts, and literacy, as strengths of the school. Several teachers referred to characteristics of the students: "children who enjoy learning", "children who have a thirst for learning".

Seven teachers made suggestions for change. Three teachers suggested that they should work in multi-level syndicates. There were 2 suggestions about sharing of leadership opportunities across the school, and continuing to further develop collaborative approaches to working together.

Support Staff Views

Profile of Support Staff Who Completed Surveys

Sex	Female	7
	Male	1
Position	Teacher's aide	6
	Deputy librarian	1 (also a teacher's aide)
	Office manager	
	Office assistant	1
	Caretaker/cleaner	2 (1 is also a teacher's aide)
Years at Villa School	Less than 2	1
	2–4 years	4
	5–10 years	2
	11–20 years	
	21 plus years	1
Qualifications	Teacher aide certificate, registered enrolled nurse and NZQA Certificate in Aromatherapy, Horticulture qualification (not specified)	
Membership of professional organisations	NZEI (2), NZNO	

Support staff mirrored patterns in the teachers' views about recognition and promotion of student success, and relations with community. Support staff were also positive about their own enjoyment of their work. The items on which more than half of support staff strongly agreed, and there was no uncertainty, were:

- Student success is regularly celebrated in this school.
- Students' work is prominently displayed.
- Staff encourage students to try their very best.
- Staff in this school work hard to promote and maintain good relations with the community.
- The staff encourage parents to be involved in the school.
- Support staff like working in the school.

Support staff expressed most uncertainty about the following items:

- Support staff have input into the school's strategic plan.
- There is mutual respect between staff and senior staff in this school.
- The senior staff communicate a clear vision of where this school is going.

These items are about involvement in school goals and working relationships between senior staff and others. Likewise, the teachers were uncertain about whether support staff have input into the strategic plan.

Support Staff Views of Change Over Time

Support staff were in agreement that positive changes had been made to the way the school runs, and that progress was monitored more now. Most were uncertain about whether the school makes more use of te reo Māori now, and there was some uncertainty about whether parents showed more interest in children's learning than previously.

Three support staff identified ICT and ICTPD, "a complete refurbishment of the school and landscaping of the grounds", and "award for the best primary school" as achievements over the past 3–4 years. Four support staff thought ICT was a strength of the school, and 2 identified "effective" or "stronger" management as a strength.

Suggestions for changes were made by 4 support staff; these included maintaining high standards, allowing more time for consolidation in many areas, improving the grounds and toilet facilities, and developing closer links with local iwi.

Challenges for the Future

When asked about the future direction of the school, most interviewees stressed the need to consolidate their achievements, and to continue to improve the quality of education offered to children. The issue of workload was raised by teachers and parents, who expressed concern at the intensity required to meet school expectations.

A senior teacher told us that while she found her work challenging and exciting, "sometimes I get worn out. In the weekend I usually spend one whole day on school work."

She commented that because of the implicit pressure to perform, "you can't just keep on giving, giving, and giving; something has to go, your health, or your family".

She also noted that the staffing profile now consisted primarily of young and enthusiastic women in their twenties, who were prepared to expend considerable additional time and money to ensure that their classes were exemplary. Several teachers pointed out that while teachers were committed to their students achieving, and were proud of their achievements, there was a "driven" quality to their work, which may not be able to be sustained over time.

Parents and support staff also pointed out that it was necessary to avoid "burn-out" in teachers. "You can keep up pace for 2–3 years only." The board chair wanted the school to be able to "maintain the momentum without burn-out".

Being recognised nationally as a successful school, and constantly receiving visitors, creates additional pressures on staff. One person commented that unless this was carefully managed, the school could be "a victim of its own success".

This school, like other New Zealand primary schools, is unlikely to experience significant roll growth because of population demographics. The school has been approached by the Montessori Association to consider siting two Montessori classrooms on site. Currently this is being carefully explored with the association, Ministry of Education officials, teachers, and the community.

Summary

Villa School is an interesting example of a school that has undergone striking changes in organisational culture, structure, and knowledge in response to a time of crisis in its history. The "crisis" occurred because of an external agency, through a negative ERO report. Until then, organisational deficiencies were obscured by the nature of the community and student body, and by the individual commitment of teachers to do their best for the students in their care. A collective sense of school-wide responsibility was not in evidence.

The case study illustrates the impact of a particular style of change management that addressed the school's deficiencies head on, "turned up the heat" with regard to expectations of teachers, and moved student learning centre stage. It points to the powerful impact of a focused and dynamic management approach, well aligned with the expectations and desires of the board of trustees.

Teachers are expected to work hard, but there are rewards and opportunities for those who do, as well as sanctions for those who don't. The principal has built a high-performing team in a very short period of time. In a school where children's learning comes first, teacher performance issues are confronted and addressed. This approach, while alienating some teachers, has attracted others who are prepared to commit to an innovative and entrepreneurial approach to school management.

The school now has a young, energetic team of teachers who have a shared passion for high-quality teaching and learning, effectiveness, and efficiency. Classrooms are educationally vibrant, and displays of students' work illustrate the concerted efforts that teachers make to encourage students to engage in challenging and purposeful learning. The potential of ICT is exploited with increasing confidence by teachers. New learning technologies are incorporated in everyday learning situations.

Teachers are encouraged to develop professionally and personally, and the principal offers coaching to support them, and to expand the leadership capacity with the school. Learning is expected and encouraged for all.

What implications can be drawn from this study in relation to school improvement? A possible implication is that particular management styles are appropriate at particular points in a school's educational history. Where there is an urgent need for change, change may be effected quickly by a "heroic" individual with the skills to turn things around. The next principal can build on the systems that have been established and allow them to consolidate. Several people we interviewed speculated that the strength of this principal was to set a new course for a school, develop the internal capacity of staff to manage for themselves, and then move on to another challenge.

An apt metaphor may perhaps be that of a ship, where the principal sets the sails for a new direction, develops the crew's skills in navigation, and then leaves to captain another ship.

Villa School has moved a great distance in a short period of time. What will we find on our return in 3–4 years time? Will teachers be able to sustain the momentum, or do they risk burn-out? If so, will they be replaced by other talented and committed individuals? Will approaches to learning and teaching continue to change, to reflect new visions of schooling for the knowledge society? If so, we would expect to see further changes in school organisation and use of buildings, to suit the needs of the knowledge society. Will the current principal remain, and if so, in what ways will his role have changed?

We and our readers will have to wait until our next report.

Table 48

Year 6 Students' Views of Their Experience at School (n=26)

School is a place where	Mostly	Sometimes	Never/hardly ever	No response
I have good friends	23	3		
My teacher tells me when I do good work	22	4		
I like my teachers	20	6		
The rules are fair	20	5	1	
Teachers help me to improve my work	19	6		1
Teachers treat me fairly	19	6		1
I feel safe in the playground	19	6	1	
Teachers listen to what I say	18	8		
I enjoy myself	18	8		
I do interesting things	18	7		1
I can learn what I need for the future	18	7		1
Teachers explain things clearly to me	17	8		1
I keep out of trouble	16	10		
I learn most things pretty quickly	14	12		
I get all the help I need	11	13	1	
I could do better work if I tried	10	14	2	
Students behave well in class	7	18	1	
I get bored	5	16	5	
I get tired of trying	3	12	11	
I get bullied	3	6	16	1
I feel lonely	1	13	11	1
I feel restless		18	7	1
I get a hard time		17	9	
I get upset		12	13	1

Table 49

Year 4 Students' Views of Their Experience at School (n=27)

School is a place where	Mostly	Sometimes	Never/hardly ever	No response
My teacher is kind to me	24	3		
Children in my class behave well	22	5		
I like my school	21	5		1
I try hard at school	20	7		
I belong in this school	19	7	1	
My teacher tells me when I do good work	19	8		
I feel safe in the playground	18	9		
My teacher is fair to me	11	15	1	
My teacher helps me to do better work	10	16	1	
I like my work	3	24		

Table 50

Teachers' Views of Their School (n=12)

The school now	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	No response
Students' work is prominently displayed	10	2			
Staff encourage students to try their best	9	3			
Teachers in this school believe that all students can learn	9	2	1		
Non-teaching staff feel involved in the life of the school	9	1	2		
Staff in this school work hard to promote and maintain good relations with the community	8	4			
Student success is regularly celebrated in this school	8	4			
Adults (teachers) as well as students learn in this school	8	3	1		
Teachers regularly monitor the learning and progress of individual children	7	5			
Teachers pay attention to keeping the school environment attractive	7	5			
The board of trustees plays a significant role in supporting developments within the school	7	5			
The school allows staff joint planning time	7	4	1		
Staff feel encouraged to bring forward new ideas	7	4	1		
Staff have a commitment to the whole school and not just their class or syndicate	7	4	1		
Staff ensure that students receive constructive feedback about their work	6	6			
Teachers respect students	6	6			
New staff are well supported in this school	6	6			
Teachers believe that all children can be successful	6	6			
The primary concern of everyone in the school is student learning	6	6			
If staff have a problem with their teaching they usually turn to colleagues for help	6	5	1		
Teachers regularly collaborate to plan their teaching	6	4	2		
Students respect teachers	5	7			
Students in this school are enthusiastic about learning	5	7			
Teachers in this school believe that all students can be successful	5	7			
Students are clear about standards of behaviour expected in the school	5	7			
Teachers like working in the school	5	6	1		
There is regular staff discussion about how to achieve school goals and targets	5	6	1		
Teachers share similar beliefs and attitudes about effective teaching/learning	5	6	1		
Disruption in classes is dealt with promptly so that learning for all students can proceed	5	6	1		
Staff development time is used effectively in the school	5	5	2		
Extra-curricular activities provide valuable opportunities for all students	5	5	2		
Staff participate in important decision making	5	5	1	1	
Teachers have a say in topics selected for the school's staff development programme	5	4	2	1	
Teachers regularly discuss ways of improving students' learning	4	8			
Teachers encourage students to be independent learners	4	8			
Senior staff are available to discuss curriculum/teaching matters	4	8			
Expectations about school work are communicated clearly to all students	4	8			
Parents are clear about behaviour standards expected in school	4	8			
Every attempt is made to set challenging standards of achievement for each student	4	8			
The school communicates clearly to parents the standard of work it expects from students	4	7	1		
Whole school meetings are worthwhile	4	6	2		

The school now	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	No response
At staff meetings time is spent on important things rather than on minor issues	4	6	2		
Standards set for students are consistently upheld across the school	4	6	2		
The staff encourage parents to be involved in the school	4	6	2		
The school development plan includes practical ways of evaluating success in achieving goals and targets	4	4	3		1
Decision-making processes are fair	3	7	1		1
Senior staff openly recognise teachers when they do things well	3	7	1		1
Teachers have a say in the school strategic plan	3	5	3	1	
There is effective communication between senior staff and teachers	2	9	1		
There is mutual respect between staff and senior staff in this school	2	8	2		
The senior staff communicate a clear vision of where the school is going	2	7	3		
Non-teaching staff have input into the school strategic plan	1	3	8		
There is effective communication among teachers		11			1
Teachers regularly observe each other in the classroom and give each other feedback		4	5	3	
Students have some say in the school strategic plan		3	7	2	

Table 51

Teachers' Views of Change Over Last 3–4 Years (n=12)

Change over the last 3–4 years	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	No response
We have more professional development	6	1			5
We have made positive changes to the way the school runs	5	2			5
We have made positive changes to how we plan ahead	5	1			6
We have more contact with other schools	4	1		1	6
We have made positive changes to the way we teach	4	3			5
We monitor our progress more	3	4			5
We enjoy our work more	3	1	1	1	6
We expect more of our students	2	5			5
Student behaviour has improved	1	4		1	6
We acknowledge children's cultures more	1	2	2	1	6
Parents show more interest in their children's learning		3	3		6
We make more use of te reo Māori		1	2	3	6

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Table 52

Support Staff Views of Their school (n=8)

The school now	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	No response
Teachers respect students	3	5			
Student success is regularly celebrated in this school	6	1	1		
Staff in this school work hard to promote and maintain good relations with the community	6	1			
Students' work is prominently displayed	6	2			
Support staff feel involved in the life of the school	5	2	1		
Staff encourage students to try their very best	5	3			
Support staff like working in this school	5	3			
The staff encourage parents to be involved in the school	5	3			
New staff are well supported in this school	4	4			
Staff feel encouraged to bring forward new ideas	4	4			
The primary concern of everyone in the school is student learning	4	4			
Disruption in classes is dealt with promptly so that learning for all students can proceed	4	4			
Students are clear about standards of behaviour expected in the school	4	4			
Staff participate in important decision making	3	3	2		
There is effective communication between teachers and support staff	3	4	1		
Staff have a commitment to the whole school and not just their class or syndicate	3	4	1		
Staff pay attention to keeping the school environment attractive	3	4	1		
Senior staff openly recognise support staff when they do things well	3	4	1		
Staff development time is used effectively in the school	3	5			
Extra-curricular activities provide valuable opportunities for all students	3	5			
The board of trustees plays a significant role in supporting developments with the school	3	5			
Support staff have input into the school strategic plan	2	2	3	1	
Whole school meetings are worthwhile	2	4	2		
Parents are clear about behaviour standards expected in the school	2	4	2		
Teachers believe that all children can be successful	2	5	1		
At staff meetings time is spent on important things rather than on minor issues	2	5	1		
Adults as well as students learn in this school	2	6			
There is regular staff discussion about how to achieve school goals/targets	2	6			
Teachers in this school believe that all students can learn	2	6			
There is mutual respect between staff and senior staff in this school	1	4	3		
The senior staff communicate a clear vision of where the school is going	1	4	3		
The school development plan includes practical ways of evaluating success in achieving goals and targets	1	6	1		
There is effective communication among staff	1	7			
The school communicates clearly to parents the standard of work it expects from students	1	7			
Teachers in this school believe that all students can be successful	1	7			
Decision-making processes are fair		7	1		
Students respect staff		6	1		1
Students in this school are enthusiastic about learning		7	1		
Standards set for students are consistently upheld across the school		7	1		

Table 53

Support Staff Views of Changes in the Last 3–4 Years (n=18)

Change over the last 3–4 years	Strongly agree n=	Agree n=	Uncertain n=	Disagree n=	Don't know n=	No response n=
We have made positive changes to the way the school runs	3	5				
We monitor our progress more	3	5				
We enjoy our work more	3	4	1			
We have more professional development	3	3				2
We acknowledge children's cultures more	2	4	1			1
We have made positive changes to the way we teach	1	7				
We expect more of our students	1	6	1			
We have made positive changes to how we plan ahead	1	6				1
We have more contact with other schools	1	5	2			
Student behaviour has improved		5	1			2
Parents show more interest in their children's learning		4	3			1
We make more use of te reo Māori		2	5			1

Sector and Official Views of School Improvement in New Zealand

> We can consider that the classroom is an activity system. But that activity system is nested in the whole lot of other activity systems which are classrooms in the school, and the school itself is an institution. And the school itself as an institution is nested in the activity system which is the education system. So you can legitimately seek improvements at any of those levels: micro levels, the institutional level . . . or at the . . . public policy level.
>
> (Phil Capper, researcher)

What does school improvement look like to those who support schools or implement policy? We undertook 32 interviews with experienced school sector personnel, government officials, and organisation representatives. The purpose of these interviews was to provide understanding and insight into the contexts in which schools operate and improve. We aimed to highlight factors that seem to assist, are neutral, or hinder schools from improving; gather views of the things that could make the greatest difference to school improvement; and examine whether understanding about school improvement is shared by those individuals and groups who were interviewed.

Interviews were held with the following individuals and organisational representatives who have a national overview or extensive involvement in the work of schools, and could be expected to have well-developed viewpoints about school improvement:

- practising principals (4). Two of the NZEI Te Riu Roa representatives were also practising principals.
- representatives of major organisations in the schools sector, i.e., NZEI Te Riu Roa (3), New Zealand School Trustees Association (2), New Zealand Principals' Federation (1), Association of Proprietors of Integrated Schools (1), New Zealand Business Roundtable (1);
- officials from Ministry of Education (5), The Treasury (3), Teacher Registration Board (1), Te Puni Kokiri (1)
- academics and researchers (4)
- teacher educators (5) (Most teacher educators were also researchers.)

Appendix 5 lists the names and organisations of participants. The Education Review Office declined to take part, because a review of the roles and responsibilities of the Education Review Office (Review Committee of the Roles and Responsibilities of the Education Review Office, 2000) was then being considered by the government, and the Chief Reviewer did not want to promote its position publicly with respect to the review.

All the interviews were individual ones, except for a group interview with the 3 Treasury officials, and a group interview with 2 of the teacher educators.

The interviews took place in February and March 2001. Questions (Appendix 6) focused on the nature of school improvement, factors that enhance or inhibit school improvement, and any tensions between school improvement and external factors or requirements. Consent to use the names of participants was obtained (Appendix 7).

Understanding of School Improvement

There were many shared understandings about school improvement and the purpose of schools. Most participants thought that the core purpose of schools was to enhance student learning. This learning built on a broad basic education in the essential learning areas, and incorporated attitudes, knowledge, and skills which would allow useful social participation, the development of a commitment to learning and investigation, and a clear sense of identity. They emphasised the value of schools setting their own goals.

However, there were some different definitions amongst participants of the term "school improvement", which reflected differences in the role that participants had within the school sector. Three underlying approaches to school improvement could be identified.

1. School Improvement as Generative Development

This approach emphasises the need for the active engagement of those involved in a school in debating and negotiating the curriculum they provided, within a local context of place, values, relationships, and national and international frameworks. School participants generate their own school culture, which is valued and evolving. There is no blueprint for a "good" school, since each needs to work out the meaning of this for itself.

Students, teachers, and parents are not passive recipients of "knowledge", but are active in their own learning, seeking understanding, and contributing to the learning of others. School is a place of ongoing enquiry. These features set the basis for ongoing school improvement.

This perspective was emphasised by most of the principals, teacher educators, academics, and researchers.

2. School Improvement to Lift School Performance

The role of government in intervening with schools to "lift their performance", or work with schools that are not meeting government requirements, is highlighted in this approach, though the fundamental importance of schools working through their own culture and processes, and with their communities, as they seek to raise student achievement, is also highlighted. This theme was emphasised predominantly by Ministry of Education and Treasury officials.

3. School Improvement Through Incentives for Higher Performance

A third approach saw the way for schools to improve was through incentives on schools to raise their performance by better information to parents on student achievement and by parental choice of schools. How schools reacted to external incentives was their responsibility, and different schools could be expected to take different approaches. This perspective was emphasised by the Business Roundtable representative, one principal, and an education organisation representative. In one view, this approach was associated with reduced government involvement, with schools free to use funding as they wished and to hire and fire teachers without legislative barriers, and parental choice able to be exercised freely.

Each of these three approaches is examined in more detail below.

1. School Improvement as Generative Development

Like Stoll (1999), some participants emphasised that in an improving school, the purpose of education is not taken for granted or received from above, but is debated, negotiated, and constructed.

> I see the improving school as one that is quite discerning about the nature of the content of what actually comprises its instructional programmes, and I think the improving school has to transcend, elevate itself beyond the systemic view of 'this is the laid down curriculum' and consider, 'What is the curriculum appropriate to this learner?' (Lester Flockton, academic)

> School improvement implies that a school takes a really careful look at where it is at the moment against its own expectations of what a school is—and that should come from the community, board, staff—and that it systematically through self-review sets out to work out what it's good at and what it's not good at and then sets up a system to go through some steps of improvement to meet its expectations. Those expectations may of course come from the legislative requirements, either as understood by the school or as put over by ERO. (Murray Gadd, teacher educator)

> [School improvement is] any action taken in a school aimed at raising educational achievements for students...Educational achievement in the broader sense of the word. My definition relates to the core activity of the school. . . . The charter really still provides the basis of community input. Community involvement in the writing of that, or the reviewing of that, in itself sets some goals that can guide the Board of Trustees. (Darrell Ward, NZEI Te Riu Roa)

In this view, schools need to construct their own values and goals, albeit within local, national, and international frameworks and bodies of knowledge. This construction is not a one-off process, but is continuing and evolving. It has meaning for the school, and underpins the way in which it operates. According to one of the principals, the school values should be "bedded into the beliefs of the school". This requires involvement of staff and parents, and careful attention to the induction of new staff, who need to understand why things are the way they are.

One research participant described the process as building "a theory of schooling" and "a unique school culture" that comes not only from those in the school, but from the community and the wider world.

> The theory of the school can't come straight out of the teachers. The school belongs in the context, the context is its community as well as the wider world. My bias in this is that the Māori world has a contribution to make to this idea. (Wally Penetito, academic)

There may be tension between this process of building a "theory of schooling", and centralised practices and requirements. Penetito believed that school knowledge is traditionally perceived as being universal, whereas local knowledge is particular to context. What local knowledge should be available, and how it should be handed down through schooling, needs to be negotiated and created locally. He thought a dilemma is created where universal knowledge is given precedence over local knowledge.

> . . . kids come to school at 5 or 6, they spend 10 or 11 years in the education system getting this thing called "education". Then they come out at the other end and what they know is assessed at that point . . . It's dealing with all that generic knowledge; but particular knowledge related to Māori and to place and . . . knowledge that's about your perception as a person—identity things—are quite often treated in a marginal, peripheral way. (Wally Penetito, academic)

In a generative model of school improvement, school is a "learning community" where everyone—staff, parents, board and community members, as well as students—is engaged in learning and accepts themselves as learners. There is emphasis on deepening understanding about teaching and learning, and the processes by which learning occurs. This requires teachers to be reflective, questioning what they do and why, deciding what is important, and critically examining the school's learning environment.

> So you are constantly saying to teachers on the staff, 'What do you do?' And 'What does that mean?' Or 'What do you think of what you do?' And this sort of preoccupation with the way people think, and then moving off into some sort of reflective taxonomy, is a way of improving what happens to children. (David Stewart, teacher educator/researcher)

> In a school improvement model, school is a place where there is considerable ongoing investigation into the conditions that impact on learning within the place. By the conditions of learning, I mean what actually impacts on learning, e.g., the nature of relationships between students and teachers, between teachers and teachers, the relationships between the sorts of resources used for teaching and learning, the extent to which the school carefully monitors how it's impacting on students' motivations to learn, the affective as well as the cognitive is quite critical. (Lester Flockton, academic)

> The school is always in review mode, trialing, evaluating, and if it doesn't work, modifying. (Marilyn Gwilliam, principal)

It requires teachers to encourage students to be self-analytic.

> High expectations are a big part of our vision. Children who come to this school [decile 3] need more work than children who come from a high decile school. Teachers cannot waste time. We have to teach teachers what we mean by high expectation, which is saying to the children, 'Is this the best you can do? Is there more work that you can do on this?' And we work on the quality of the feedback to students. (Judy Hanna, principal)

A related issue for two principals and a teacher educator/researcher is whether the language of "school improvement" enables us to express what is important in education, without reducing its complexity, or over-emphasising simplified performance measures and results. The two principals conveyed a wary scepticism about the use of the term "school improvement" and some of our questions, on the basis that these suggested the existence of a universal standard of "success". The teacher educator/researcher took issue with the term, saying it suggested that what schools are doing at the time isn't good enough. Schools are challenged to become as good as the "successful" schools, when the issue of improving teaching and learning is much more complex. He suggested alternative terms.

> "School development", "curriculum development", "culture development", "improving culture, teaching and learning" describe more what we are on about than the notion of "school improvement". (David Stewart, teacher educator/researcher)

He thought that the notion of "continuous improvement" puts pressure on teachers to think that they have always to change what they are doing, when they are already doing what they believe is in the best interests of students. This may inhibit a deeper consideration of how learning occurs.

One principal took a different tack: unless a school is constantly moving, it has plateaued and is actually going backwards, because demands continue to increase and requirements shift. In his view, in order to be on the track of "continuous improvement", the school culture needs to include a level of dissatisfaction with what the school is doing, as well as recognition of progress. Similarly, another principal said that a climate of continuous improvement enabled the school to make small incremental steps all of the time, and respond to changing contexts, including changes in student needs.

These views are not necessarily inconsistent, with an element in both being that school improvement involves a problem-solving approach and an understanding of what is helpful in a particular school context. Both views are also concerned that teachers dig beneath the surface. But does the impetus to do so come from within or outside the school? Does continual school improvement mean adding on to what is already done, or changing it?

A main feature of the principals' views was a sense of their own practical experience in working in schools. This came through in the detail of how their school actually operated, compared with more abstract descriptions by those who are one step removed, as the following quotations illustrate.

> If we have a focus on literacy, then we look for good articles from New Zealand and abroad that would talk about good literacy practices. Teachers are in teams of four, they stay in those for the year and instead of staff meetings we have alternate weeks when teachers meet and discuss the articles and their implications for classroom practice. There are teachers from each area of the school, so we get the whole across the school focus. (Judy Hanna, principal)

> I want to see that these conversations among teachers and leaders are predominantly about learning. . . . In a school that is improving the dominant metaphor would be about learning. (David Stewart, teacher educator/ researcher)

One researcher differentiated between "school improvement", which he defined as "doing what you do better", and "school innovation", which he defined as "doing things differently". He thought that in the best of all possible worlds, "continuous improvement" is both "trying new things and doing things differently".

Some highlighted that while the school as a whole organisation has an impact on teachers and students, making changes to the infrastructure does not necessarily mean improvements in teaching and learning. There can be an appearance of change, and schools can get a reputation for change, without the core work of the classroom having altered. An example given by one teacher educator was of a school that had spent a great deal on buildings and policies, but without any work at the classroom level, or any discernible changes to learning. The crux of school improvement was perceived to be improvements in what happens in the classroom.

2. School Improvement to Lift School Performance

Government officials described school improvement with reference to government policy for schools, and contexts for encouraging school performance and improvement. Ministry of Education officials acknowledged they came from a perspective of dealing with schools that have problems. They said the government policy around school improvement is based on student achievement, and identified two specific initiatives. Schooling improvement initiatives are offered for clusters or groups of schools that are not at the safety net level, but need to have some assistance to lift their performance. Intervention with these schools typically involves either a curriculum emphasis or a governance and management emphasis. This contrasts with Schools Support, which is a safety net for individual schools that are "at risk" of being unable to meet their legal obligations, and provides a "more serious intervention".

Both Treasury and Ministry of Education officials also referred to government targets for improving student achievement, particularly for Māori and Pasifika students, and for literacy and numeracy. (These targets are not specific, but refer to broad aims about reducing disparities in achievement between Māori students and others and Pasifika students and others in the school sector.) The officials regarded achievement in the broader sense as important.

> There's several dimensions. One is school improvement in terms of individual schools improving themselves. And that can be a huge continuum, from schools that are failing in a whole lot of ways that need to improve themselves, all the way to schools that are excellent, excelling, who are continually self-developing and trying to exceed and further develop. I would also think school improvement has a government or national focus, in terms of the school system and the improvement of the school system. That could be a regional focus, but it's suggesting more groupings of schools or improvement for Māori and Pacific Islands students or some more national type objectives around the school system. (Fiona Ross, Treasury)

Treasury officials saw schools serving their own goals, as well as national targets. One Treasury official said he did not believe that schooling improvement could be mandated by government: it needed to be "driven from within schools themselves", and required the collaboration and co-operation of schools. He advocated clarity about what is meant by "improvement", and said that while student achievement is critical, student achievement interrelates with other factors such as the working environment for teaching staff, and health and safety.

Likewise, a Ministry of Education official thought that many factors contribute to student achievement, and it could not be considered separately from school performance, and school and community relationships.

> I like to think of [school improvement] as a triangle where student achievement is the pinnacle of the triangle … and that the strong base is strong school performance and strong school and community relationships. (Ministry of Education)

She thought school performance included:

- a safe and healthy environment;
- an open, collaborative, and honest school culture where there are high expectations and a determination to succeed;
- good teachers, good programmes, and quality resources;
- effective governance and management.

In their statements about Schools Support and schooling improvement, officials highlighted what is done in schools, with a government support role being available as a backstop for schools at risk, or needing help to improve. Treasury officials described schools as being different in their capabilities, with some needing more support than others. Two questions were raised by the Ministry of Education:

- Who is responsible for school improvement?
- How are schools that require support identified?

A distinction was made between schooling in New Zealand, where some of the ownership or stewardship interests have been divested to schools, and in other countries, where schooling is owned by governments. In a school that is improving, there would be a culture of self-review, which would be independently reviewed and evaluated. The Ministry of Education encourages schools to do this outside of the ERO cycle, through schools taking ownership and control themselves, although ERO carries out independent reviews and evaluations for schools in Schools Support. The key stakeholders (principal, staff, students, and community) should participate in self-review and strategic planning. The Ministry of Education has a role in enabling communities and boards to assume the responsibilities that the education legislation and education policy envisages, where they need support to do that. One of the ways in which this is done is through insisting on a community partnership in schooling improvement projects.

Conditions to sustain all schools could be developed at different levels, with responsibility for school improvement not resting with the school alone. A Ministry of Education official herself thought that there should be partnership between schools, ERO, and the Ministry of Education, which was yet to be achieved. Ministry of Education officials thought schools that identify themselves as needing support are different from schools identified by an external review, because the former were aware of problems and wanted to take action to resolve them. They also thought that often the Ministry did not get involved in schools early enough, and that officials often had to prioritise because resources were limited.

3. School Improvement to Meet External Standards

The New Zealand Business Roundtable official, one school sector organisation representative, and one of the principals described core elements of school improvement primarily in relation to student achievement in examinations.

> [I'd expect to see] higher achievement, higher scholastic achievement…I know there are other important things like socialising and becoming good citizens and the rest of it. But you don't have to go to school to do that. You do have to go to school to learn things. (Michael Irwin, New Zealand Business Roundtable)

Arguments for the use of national or international assessment tools to compare students' progress and achievements, and set school goals, tended to go hand in hand with this focus on achievement.

> I am really talking about students, young people, meeting agreed standards or coming closer to agreed national standards. (Pat Lynch, Association of Proprietors of Integrated Schools)

> Will I know that my little Johnny or Jill is in the 52nd percentile of Australian or Australasian kids, for example for mathematics? And the 62nd for science? And the third for English? I'd want to know how he or she is doing against some sort of internationally recognised benchmark. It is important for parents to know that their child is, or is not, making progress, but it is also important that they are able to gauge his or her achievement level against a wider

> national or international benchmark. Without that wider benchmark, parents can be seriously misguided about their child's ability and attainment level. (Michael Irwin, New Zealand Business Roundtable)

This view was not necessarily associated with a high level of centralised control. Benchmarks of national assessment were regarded as the "measure" that a school was effective in improving student achievement, but how this happened could be determined by the individual school. In the Business Roundtable representative's view, schools should be enabled and empowered to do different things.

> I'd allow a wide range of enterprise at the ground roots, which means central bureaucracy deliberately withdrawing its sticky fingers. (Michael Irwin, New Zealand Business Roundtable)

Common Views

While there were different views of the nature and purpose of education, almost everybody related "school improvement" to development or improvement in quality of teaching programmes and student learning. Most participants thought it was crucial in education settings for teachers to focus on the learning of individual students, and of subgroups of students. Demonstration that students in the school as a whole, or in a cohort, are achieving well could mask a "tail" of underachievement within the school. Many said that school improvement involves a process of analysis and evaluation of information, and use of that information in a systematic way to widen understanding, and to plan programmes and school practices. The unit of analysis could be at an individual student or school-wide level.

Most participants also referred to conditions that provide a platform for improving the quality of teaching and learning. Most thought that the quality of external relationships—with the government agencies that support and frame the work of schools, and with schools' own communities—were crucial to school improvement. The issues of relationships between schools and government agencies, government policies, data analysis and action, professional development, leadership and management, and the role of communities are discussed in the following sections.

The Government Framework for Schools

While schools are the site of action expected to make a positive difference to student learning, there are systems and support structures intended to help them. What is needed to sustain schools and help them create good learning environments? This section explores the participants' thinking about 3 key aspects of government's relationships with schools. These are: external accountability requirements and the operation of the Education Review Office (ERO); government requirements, policies, and resourcing; and the relationship between schools and the Ministry of Education.

ERO and External Accountability

The Education Review Office (ERO) is a government department whose role is to report publicly on the education of students in schools and early childhood services. It undertakes 3 types of review related to schools:

- education reviews of the quality of education in schools and early childhood centres;
- cluster reviews of education on groups or areas with common features;
- evaluation reports on specific education issues (ERO, 2002).

Since its establishment in 1989, issues have arisen about whether ERO should provide an independent audit of schools, or whether it should also support schools (Review Committee on the Roles and Responsibilities of the Education Review Office, 2000). In 2000, a committee to review the role of ERO was established, and charged with the following tasks:

- evaluate the role and extent of external evaluation that would improve school and early childhood education service effectiveness, and recommend on external evaluation models suitable for kaupapa Māori models and mainstream settings;
- advise on the relationships between external evaluations and self-reviews, and other processes to enhance school and early childhood performance;
- advise on the link between external evaluations and follow-up actions that would enhance the effectiveness of school and early childhood service-based education;
- advise on effective linkages between those conducting external evaluations, and those government agencies with responsibility for school and early childhood education;
- advise on structures, roles and responsibilities of those involved in external evaluation and follow-up actions to support school and early childhood education improvement (Review Committee on the Roles and Responsibilities of the Education Review Office, 2000, p. 5).

The review was published several months before our interviews, and most participants were aware of it and spoke of its recommendations. The review confirmed that ERO should remain independent, and that it should focus on educational improvement, while also maintaining its compliance functions. Among its 27 recommendations were that ERO adopt an "assess and assist" model, and that review reports recognise the achievements of educational institutions, and include a balance of commendation and recommendation in relation to areas of concern. A recommended function was to provide advice of a short-term nature to schools, and to take greater responsibility for in-house and external training on the nature of external review and self-review. Other recommendations related to the capabilities of ERO staff, and relationships with the Ministry of Education.

We asked participants to describe any tensions between school improvement and external factors. Over a third identified tensions between the role of ERO and school improvement. The relationships between school review and external review, the knowledge and skills of ERO reviewers, and ERO's priorities were all canvassed. Most participants also made comment on the proposed new direction of ERO.

In keeping with a wide belief that schools need to be responsible for developing their own plans, most participants thought that ERO reviews should address those plans. They thought that ERO reviews were counterproductive if they did not encompass them, with principals and school sector representatives giving examples of this occurring. However, most of those holding this view thought that working out a productive review process that focuses on the school's plans and goals was not solely the responsibility of ERO. Some thought that schools themselves dance to an imagined tune when they think they are required to respond to external accountability processes by generating documentation for ERO, instead of documentation to further their own goals and plans. This did not preclude ERO from judging these plans or giving advice to further them.

> Sometimes schools believe there are more accountabilities than there are. For example, with my experience of ERO, teachers believe that ERO make them do a lot of things, which is not true. (Mike Hollings, Te Puni Kokiri)

> Schools that think they have to replicate a picture rather than draw a picture. They are focusing on accountability to ERO, rather than accountability to teaching and learning. And so they constantly think, 'What do you want me to provide?' rather than 'What can I provide?' (Lyn Bareta, adviser)

On the other hand, some thought there was prescription in the New Zealand system, which was producing some "clonage".

> We've got a very prescriptive system and it's becoming increasingly so. They are talking about new NAGs and putting in government policy objectives and that sort of thing. The policy objectives need to be those that are enjoined by the community. That's what's really going to count, not some centralised notion about what's going to be good for everybody, that one size is going to fit all. (Lester Flockton, academic)

The principals and The New Zealand Principals' Federation representative highlighted the wastage of time and effort that emerges when there are disjunctions between documentation to inform teaching practice, and documentation for external accountability. They made a plea for reviewers who are effective practitioners themselves, and knowledgeable about primary schools.

> Over the last decade there has been a tension between what we record for possible viewing by ERO, as opposed to what we record for children's growth and development. (Geoff Lovegrove, Principals' Federation)

> At one of my school's first ERO visits, ERO was concerned because the pool fence was not as good as it should be according to them. It was all right for the council. There wasn't enough bark in the playground. Yet there were four

> classrooms they never even went in, let alone looked at the kids' books to see what the maths and what the reading looked like. I believe if they were measuring school effectiveness, they were looking at the wrong things. Things have been moving on since then, and the focus is more on teaching and learning. (Bruce Adin, NZEI Te Riu Roa)

Jan Hill and Kay Hawk, teacher educators/researchers, said they often see inadequate assessment of the issues coming through ERO reviews. Symptoms are highlighted from observable things, but the cause of the symptoms is not identified. The symptoms are then "band-aided", but the problem continues. They thought that if a school is to embark on a school improvement project, it needs a "very clear and honest and transparent opening of the books…An inaccurate identification of the needs can sometimes exacerbate the problem, it just keeps popping up somewhere else along the line." They noted that sometimes problems faced by schools are sensitive, because they involve people in the school, and staff and parents have avoided dealing with them. In addition, sometimes the senior staff in the school do not want the issues exposed, for example, because the issues concern them. Change in teaching and learning is likely to be prevented if serious relationship problems are not addressed.

Some participants described ways in which they thought reviews could be more productive. A Ministry of Education official said that schools should be reviewed against their own plans, on the proviso that if the plan itself is deficient, ERO should comment on that. She thought that, at times, schools get caught up in responding to an external accountability process, without taking the time to self-reflect, do their own strategic planning, and be realistic about what they can achieve.

Most of those who commented on the new direction proposed for ERO were positive, because they saw its potential for providing constructive and useful evaluation, focused on meaningful aspects of school operation. This could be achieved through ERO building relationships with schools, principals, and teachers.

> We have to have external agencies that are prepared to work with the profession. (John Langley, Teacher Registration Board)
>
> I would actually see accountability as being fundamental to the way the school self-reviews. And not an external imposed thing. (Fiona Ross, Treasury)

However, 3 participants had doubts or questions about the proposed new approach. A principal was wary about the proposed "assist and support" model, because he questioned ERO's capacity to assist schools.

> What they are equipped to do is assess them. Being able to run a ruler over something, being able to measure a piece of furniture, doesn't mean you are able to make it. (Peter Gunn, principal)

The Te Puni Kokiri representative was concerned that mixing advice with audit could result in "ERO reviewing its own advice". He thought it was necessary to split these functions.

An academic had questions about ERO's proposed "commend and recommend" approach. She thought that the word "recommendation" could be a "weasel-word" approach to saying "things . . . are not going as well as they should be. So therefore do something else instead". She argued that the process of making recommendations assumes the validity of a whole lot of prior claims, which need to be put on the table and debated. The debate ought to involve agreeing on what is currently happening in the school, agreeing on its evaluation, and then agreeing on how it might be improved.

> If there's a less rigorous approach; if it's softly, softly then I'm concerned. If it's a 'let's be rigorous, but let's also share the responsibility for going, making progress,' that's fine . . . There's no shift in standards. There's just a different sense of the responsibility for follow-up on that. (Viviane Robinson, academic)

Behind these considerations about the relationship between schools and ERO seem to lie deeper questions about review, accountability, and support. Should the purposes of self-review and external review be brought together? If so, how can that happen? To whom should schools be accountable? How should schools be accountable? What is the role of school support?

There were different views about these questions, at the heart of which were views about the degree of central and local control that should be exercised. All thought that there should be accountability to government, but they differed in their views of the role of government in relation to accountability and support, what schools should have the freedom to decide, and what should be imposed. Most supported ERO's compliance role, but did not regard this as ERO's only role, as or what should drive schools.

> Of course compliance is necessary. Schools are state funded institutions and we have to be accountable for seeing statutory responsibilities are upheld. They are not really the feast. They are the table on which you are setting the feast and that has been misunderstood. They've become the feast. (Lester Flockton, academic)

> I think the policing function is very valid as a parent. You have a right to know that, because you don't have that information, you're not the professional, you can't judge, so there has to be some yardstick by which schools are measured. (Glenda Irving, Treasury)

Some of those who thought ERO needed to take on board schools' own goals proposed that accountability relating to those goals should be negotiated.

> There is nothing wrong with accountability. It is accountability to whom and to what. One of the things I think has been a problem in recent years in New Zealand is that accountability has always been externally imposed rather than mutually negotiated. (John Langley, Teacher Registration Board)

Likewise, a Ministry of Education official thought one contribution to addressing tensions between self management and central control lay in "getting the partnership right" between schools, Ministry of Education, and ERO, through "mutual accountability". She described the Ministry's third party contract with ERO for evaluations of school support projects as one successful example of "getting the partnership right" in school support. Key elements of this approach are that the school owns the process, the timeframe and expectations are realistic, and it is a formative process.

> That means that when the ERO goes in to evaluate school support projects, they go in and they evaluate against the plan that the school and the Ministry have put together in the community ... If any of the partners—ourselves, or the school, or the community—hasn't achieved what we set out to do when we planned it, then we should be held to account for it. But at least we're in control of that process. Hopefully we will have set out a programme that is realistic to achieve, and we will have ownership over that. . . . [The] feedback you get from that kind of process means it's appropriate to your planning and it gives you the opportunity to reflect . . . and think about where you want to go next. (Ministry of Education)

The experience of some of the principals was that when schools "take charge of" ERO visits, ERO has been accepting of their own goals and practices.

> As a school, our assessment is done to inform teaching and learning not to provide data for ERO. We have been careful to manage the assessment and how we use it. We have been very firm about what we do and ERO have been very accepting. (Judy Hanna, principal)

However, this notion of schools "driving" the ERO reviews is not the same as the notion of "mutual negotiation", which implies that both parties together work out the purpose, form, and timeframe of the review, and are accountable to each other. Any review will occur within a framework of government requirements. So what should government require? How should the Ministry of Education support schools?

Government Policy and Requirements and Relationships Between Schools and the Ministry of Education

A number of policy issues were described by the participants in answer to questions about external factors and school improvement, and the conditions needed to sustain school improvement over time. These included:

- the adequacy of school resourcing and funding;
- the extent to which the government should set school staffing;
- whether government funding should be tagged to particular spending purposes;
- how to work with "under-performing" teachers;
- whether there should be enrolment schemes;
- the desirable scope of government's support to schools.

Discussions on these matters reflect some of the debates that have occurred over the last decade over school staffing, industrial legislation, contractual arrangements for staff, fixed term contracts for principals, supplementary grants, bulk funding[13] of teachers' salaries, and enrolment schemes. Although we did not specify these topics in our questions, the government's treatment of them was regarded as an influence on schools' ability to "improve".

Participants all thought that high-quality teaching staff were key, but took some different stands on how to "get the best out of" staff. Many also confirmed the importance of adequate resourcing and funding, but debated the pros and cons of bulk funding of teachers' salaries.

Staffing

There was general agreement that schools need good teachers and leaders, since high-quality teaching is a key to student learning. Several issues were raised with respect to staffing and the role of government. These were:

- perceived poor quality of some programmes in teacher education institutions;
- the desirability of having smaller class sizes. Three of the principals promoted smaller class sizes, although the Business Roundtable representative pointed out that research findings are that, within the range normally encountered, class size has an insignificant effect on academic progress for most children. Thus he said that class size would have to be reduced very considerably to effect significant academic improvement over the whole cohort;
- what to do about "under-performing teachers", and how to "revitalise" teachers.

Several participants commented on the difficulty of dealing with personnel issues. Two different views came through our interviews on how to address "under-performance" of teachers and principals. One view was that current systems are adequate. Participants holding this view tended to emphasise professional development and support for teachers whose competency is causing concern, or gave ideas for rejuvenation and redirection.

> Another obstacle [to school improvement] can be a teacher who is under-performing or retiring. I have usually found that there are . . . ways of revitalising or redirecting people who are getting a bit tired and providing support and guidance for those who are under-performing . . . I have been a principal for 25 years. I have never dismissed a teacher. (Bruce Adin, NZEI Te Riu Roa)

They also tended to emphasise creative and constructive approaches to teaching standards. Some argued that government-mandated teacher appraisal and performance management systems may be counterproductive, because these systems remove the need for teachers to think and work together to construct their own concept of professional standards and professional behaviour. Linking professional standards with pay could have perversely negative effects, because teachers may be expected to work to a prescription that does not necessarily support student learning or improved teaching.

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[13] Bulk funding of teachers' salaries has also been known as "direct resourcing" and the "Fully Funded Option". Bulk funding of teachers' salaries advantaged schools where staff were not at the top of the salary scale by paying schools as if they were at the top (in secondary schools) or close to the top (in primary schools). Bulk funding was abolished in 2000.

> I don't necessarily think that appraisal systems are getting us anywhere. Likewise with the professional standards. For the government to specify the government's professional standards is at the heart of the great contradiction. A school must be given the responsibility to work out and understand and internalise and take ownership of its own professional standards. That's not fluffy thinking. If you really want improvement it has to be internalised and people don't internalise government stuff. The people who sit in Wellington and devise these things have really no appreciation of how it works out there in schools. (Lester Flockton, academic)

> Appraisal can be a huge obstacle. It can induce anxiety and fear, it can induce a lot of effort producing stuff that really doesn't make a difference to learning. Performance management actually can be a huge obstacle as well. Because it can produce exactly the opposite of its intentions. (Mary Hill, teacher educator)

A contrasting minority view was for tighter measures to enable teachers to be assessed against national standards (one participant) and for schools to have greater leeway to "remove" under-performing teachers/principals (2 participants).

An academic argued for "a set of incentives and accountabilities, operating around benchmarks and other tools, to tell whether schools needed to improve". In response to a question about what these incentives might be, she explained:

> Well, the standards that the Education Council might be coming up with. That the profession and the Ministry actually decided together that they were going to mean something. And there were some consequences and contingencies that the unions started to take into account, and we recognise that there are performance issues, substantial performance issues that should be addressed. (Viviane Robinson, academic)

These differences in viewpoints seem to reflect varying beliefs about the most important factors that motivate teachers, e.g., intrinsic satisfaction, being professionally supported, financial incentives, and differences in the ease with which under-performance can be identified.

Differences in perceptions of the teacher as worker were also evident. One participant who wanted leeway to "remove" under-performing teachers wanted schools to be free of "labour restraints". However, these are fundamental labour rights which are established in most OECD countries.

School Funding

Levels of funding, access to funding and resourcing at the time it is needed, and methods of funding delivery were highlighted by all the principals, and by some officials and organisation representatives.

Not surprisingly, the principals regarded adequacy of funding as essential for school operation. Some commented on the rise in "fixed costs", and costs associated with curriculum requirements, in recent years. Four of the 5 principals said they thought that the current level of operations funding was not adequate.

> In terms of school funding . . . there is general agreement within the sector that the fixed costs that a school has are increasing. And the only areas of flexibility within the school budget are curriculum areas. When fixed costs increase and this is not matched by immediate increases, by adjustments in operations funding, the curriculum budget takes a hiding. In recent times, the cost of capital equipment to improve curriculum programmes has increased significantly. Levels of technology have increased significantly. Most involve relatively high levels of capital. Those assets need to be maintained and renewed. My belief is that government has not yet recognised schools moving to fully integrate technology into schools so students can benefit. Money at the moment is a pittance. (Darrell Ward, NZEI Te Riu Roa)

> Government needs to make sure schools are funded and resourced to do what they ask of them. I think they are not funded appropriately for ICT and I don't think they are staffed well enough. (Judy Hanna, principal)

Views on bulk funding versus central salary funding were mixed. Those who supported bulk funding pointed to the flexibility it could bring to determine spending priorities, especially for employment of staff at different times of the year, and the consequent extra money that was available to schools.

> We were doing better [under bulk funding] because we had large sums of money that we were investing. We were not appointing staff until we needed them. (John Fleming, principal)

Flexibility, however, continued to be a feature when bulk funding was abolished in May 2000, and the savings were redistributed to all schools through the operations grant. One participant who had previously been bulk funded appreciated the ability to keep using the operations grant flexibly for teacher staffing. He commented on the new system.

> We're not swimming in money. But we are able to make it work the way we need to. I have to say that bulk funding of teachers' salaries was wonderful for us because we were adventurous and creative in the way we used teachers. The changes that have been made to the flexibility of staffing this year have gone some ways to helping us to sustain that. So I'm fairly supportive. If they were going to axe bulk funding, at least they've done it in such a way that we can work with the processes they have put in place. (Peter Gunn, principal)

Treasury officials discussed the need to have a mix of "tagged" and "untagged" funding. They thought there is tension between a school's ability to put into place an improvement programme (where the school needs to determine the priorities), and tagging resources for particular spending purposes, because the former requires the school to have flexibility and the latter is prescriptive. However, they would like to see some tagged resources, for example a requirement to make sure some resources are spent on teachers, "as being the key component of quality teaching in the school", and on property. They thought a challenge is to be clear about why resource usage is specified in some cases, and not in other cases. They said that in some areas where there are incentives for schools not to make real efforts to look after students, and specific accountability is desired, e.g., for work with "at risk" students, resourcing could be tagged. In addition, Treasury officials thought that there is no clear understanding of whether resources going into schools are adequate to do the tasks needed for school improvement. Needs across schools could vary, and questions about resource adequacy should be asked about different types of schools. At times, a short-term boost in funding could be necessary.

One Ministry of Education official and one of the researchers discussed the importance of having funding available at the time that it is needed. Both thought there should be funding and resourcing available for schools needing support to lift their performance.

> We frequently deposit a poor ERO report on a school and say, 'This is not good enough. Try harder.' And they don't know what to do to try harder, and they don't have the resources to address the issue. (Jim Douglas, Ministry of Education)

> I am actually talking about specific school improvement. [There should be] flexibility in ways in which schools can access funding without delays and when they are ready for it. (Phil Capper, researcher)

Accountability to Whom and How?

There were different views of the level of prescription, and the extent of government, community, and individual responsibility, that exist and are desirable in the schools system. These differences seemed to relate to participants' beliefs about whether schools would flourish by being treated as individual autonomous units, and allowed to get on with it with minimal government involvement, or whether schools would be strengthened through support as part of a national schooling system. All participants supported schools being accountable to government, and regarded this as necessary within a system that uses taxpayer funding, but they differed in their views of how accountability should be exercised.

A predominant view was to support a greater engagement of the Ministry of Education and the government in helping to strengthen schools. It was regarded as inefficient for each school to design its own individual systems. Therefore there was support for the Ministry of Education developing a stronger infrastructure around schools. Schools were seen as part of a national system of schooling, with stronger linkages between them able to create greater efficiencies and enrich exchange of ideas.

> I think in a sense that when Tomorrow's Schools first came in, there was huge pressure on the Ministry to withdraw and let people get on with it. And that built up ten years of assumptions on the part of school leaders that Tomorrow's Schools was about running their own show . . . There is an acceptance now that wrapped around these schools needs to be a much stronger and richer infrastructure. (Viviane Robinson, academic)

> I'm increasingly coming to the view that school based management is an expensive way of running the system. It puzzled me at the time of Tommorrow's Schools how we are going to run two and a half thousand dairies more efficiently than ten supermarkets. (Bruce Adin, NZEI Te Riu Roa)

> I think there has to be linkages with other schools. Clearly you can't come up with all the ideas and therefore you have got to look out where the good ideas are. (Pat Lynch, Association of Proprietors of Integrated Schools)

> I've convinced a number of principals down south to go up and visit some schools in South Auckland, not just to see how easy it is for us down here in comparison with them, but to develop a wider perspective about teaching and learning. (Lester Flockton, academic)

Both Ministry of Education and Treasury officials favoured a strong role for the Ministry of Education in helping schools to strengthen wider relationships, and to support their work.

Treasury officials thought the government plays a critical role in supporting individual schools as well as the "network of schooling".

> We're seeing slightly more involvement in government recognising that schools are very different in their capabilities, and some will need more support than others to do things. And the continuum . . . government has a role in supporting all ranges of the continuum, supporting the schools that are really struggling, to those that are even excelling, and enabling them to excel further. (Fiona Ross, Treasury)

They thought government policy on school clustering needs to be examined, because of the number of different clusters being formed for different purposes without apparent connections, e.g., Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour clusters, Information Technology clusters, schooling improvement clusters.

A Ministry of Education official said one of their developing roles is to help schools define what they are achieving and to report that accurately to their communities. This is aimed at enabling communities to understand better what is happening in their schools, so that there is less opportunity for mismatch between community expectations and what the school provides, and more opportunities for communities to contribute to an improvement process. In her view, there is a need for this because many schools do not have good reporting processes.

> Then I think often there is a mismatch between what the community demands and what the school gives. And so therefore you get communities that become dissatisfied with schools, and parents have simply been able, up until recently, to move their kids out. But with the new enrolment legislation that won't be quite so easy. (Ministry of Education)

One of the researchers highlighted a number of pertinent demographic factors which make uniformity desirable. A high level of transience, for example, requires a common system (although he said that this in turn may be a force against innovation). He also argued for Ministry of Education officials to be grounded in the reality of work in schools.

> Ministry offices standing more tied to the ground. And being directly and personally exposed to people in the schools. (Phil Capper, researcher)

However, a less "hands on" role for the Ministry of Education was supported by one of the principals. In this view, the government would exercise an audit role with respect to funding, and ensure funds were spent appropriately. It would provide curriculum guidelines, audit the quality of education programmes, and have the power to "correct sloppy schools quite quickly". Beyond this, the government would provide support where necessary, e.g., special education, research, and advisory services. Bulk funding and freedom from enrolment schemes were elements of this viewpoint, and schools were likened to businesses.

> No central agency can ever efficiently run any enterprise as diverse and as big as the education system. You see businesses, they do not do it. They offer franchises so they have managers responsible and they offer broad guidelines, but they do not operate where they are told to cross the t's and dot the i's. (John Fleming, principal)

Another minority view was held by the Business Roundtable representative, who thought that there could not be great initiative and innovation if an organisation works to a "bureaucratic central organisation", accountable to ministers, who are in turn accountable to Parliament. His understanding was that an increasing amount of academic research was coming to the conclusion that centred control significantly inhibited school improvement. He proposed as an alternative that schools should be accountable to parents, that parents would be informed and knowledgeable and have choice of schooling. Under this system, schools would simply make annual returns to government, including returns on students' performance.

Finally, the responses of most of the principals, school sector representatives, and teacher educators suggested that the following measures would be helpful in providing tangible ways in which all schools could be better supported:

- reducing the workload that self-management engenders;
- reducing the amount of paper work (perceived as being not necessarily relevant to teaching and learning);

- improving communication and consultation;
- redefining the "overcrowded" curriculum and providing specialist teachers;
- providing sufficient resourcing and funding;
- collecting good information and data;
- having sufficient high quality research.

On Workload:

> If the public really knew how much effort teachers put in with teaching load, and the follow on load of paper work, and the documentation, recording, planning and preparing meetings and professional development and so on, I think they would be more sympathetic. But someone has to grasp that nettle and say this is an unrealistic expectation. (Geoff Lovegrove, Principals' Federation)

On Paper Work:

> From a principal's point of view there is a hell of a lot of absolutely unnecessary paper work that comes my way, much of which I've become very good at chucking away…And nobody ever comes back to me and says, 'Why haven't you sent us that piece of paper?' (Peter Gunn, principal)

On Communications:

> I actually find the language coming from the Ministry to be quite hard at times. I would like it to be more direct and briefer and more specific. (Marilyn Gwilliam, principal)

On Consultation:

> . . . inadequate and untimely consultation models where they don't come and talk to people like principals and us, right at the formative stage. The terms of reference [for policy development] should be set using the accumulated wisdom of these groups of people and then they go out…Instead the terms of reference are set by the bureaucratic wisdom and then they go out and consult and you are expected to sign off on it and that never works. (Chris France, School Trustees Association)

On Curriculum:

> We are asked to do too much in schools. Teachers have to integrate literacy and numeracy under the new NAGs. Then teachers run around in the afternoon and try to fit in everything else. There is art, science, technology, social studies, their health, PE. It is so hard. (Marilyn Gwilliam, principal)

On Resourcing and Funding:

> It keeps coming back to the core issue—if we want our schools to perform all those multi-skilled tasks at a school-based level, then we need to resource

> them accordingly. By resourcing, I mean funding, staffing, and property. (Bruce Adin, NZEI Te Riu Roa)

On Information and Data:

> We've got to realise that if we put in a resource and make some plans and expected outcomes, we've got to keep monitoring these. It's not enough to do it and walk away and hope it all happens. (Jim Douglas, Ministry of Education)

On Research:

> We have got to get a much clearer understanding of what it means to be a professional teacher. (John Langley, Teacher Registration Board)

Data, Analysis, and Action

In the course of a school year, teachers gather significant amounts of information about the learning of their students at individual, classroom or group, and school-wide levels. This section explores views on the collection, analysis, and use of data. There was a diversity of views about what data should be collected and why.

We identified three major purposes for collecting data. These were for:

- evaluation and planning in relation to individual student learning;
- evaluation and planning in relation to school goals;
- communicating and being accountable to others, including parents, community, and government, about individual students and/or school performance.

Data in Relation to Student Learning

Most participants stressed that schools should collect data about individual students or groups of students in order to assess student learning and achievement. It wasn't enough to rely on teachers' experience or intuitions. Data could help to pinpoint students who were not achieving, and where students could be extended.

However, several acknowledged the complexity of pinning down what is meant by "student achievement".

A Ministry of Education official said that one obstacle to school improvement is lack of a coherent policy about what is meant by "student achievement", or "what we expect students to be achieving at different ages, and what kinds of assessment will contribute to raising student achievement". She did not support national testing, but rather assessment tools that could be adapted to local communities, while ensuring consistency with national assessments.

Most participants supported using national benchmarks, so that schools had a broad framework for assessment of individual students and groups of students. One of the academics, for example, thought national benchmarks are necessary so that schools can gain a wider view of the sorts of standards that students should be achieving. She pointed out the risks of schools (particularly low decile ones) relying on local school standards.

> They can so easily become ghettoized, and lose sight of the level of skill their students need to participate in New Zealand society in a satisfying way. (Viviane Robinson, academic)

Telling a parent that a child is top of his/her class is not helpful if the parent is unaware that the child would not meet national standards. She thought that the debate about a difference between assessment for improving instruction, and assessment for the purposes of knowing where a student is on some norm referenced group, had been exaggerated. She said there are, for example, many models which integrate those two aspects, for example the 6 year net.

Others who were supportive of national benchmarks cautioned that care was needed in how they were used. They emphasised that what happens in the classroom is vital to student learning, and that assessment should contribute to student learning. It was not a simple matter of compliance.

> I get bothered by definitions of school improvement that are reductionist, that say, 'we are going to raise test results', because what can be quantified or measured in such a manner can fail to adequately and properly reflect the multiple variables and factors that impact on schools, teachers, and students. Any such data is frequently an incomplete and sometimes misleading measure or indication of improvement. (Lester Flockton, academic)

Some of the principals described how assessment processes were developed and moderated within their schools, so that teachers had a common application and understanding of them.

> You have to have reliability, so that if one teacher assesses in one way, you make sure the rest assess in the same way…We are developing a whole bank of procedures and testing mechanisms and tools and so on we know are reliable and valid within the school. We equally have achievement statements so that we have certain expectations and can compare results with where our expectations are. (John Fleming, principal)

> We have a good assessment system in place. We have an assessment folder [for each individual student] and timeframe. Teachers talk about students in syndicate meetings. We have good data that we collect. We have anecdotal books where children's progress is recorded anecdotally, as well as other formalised achievement assessments that we do. (Judy Hanna, principal)

Making Effective Use of Data

Several people thought that schools and teachers have difficulty in identifying what information they need, lack good skills in data collection and analysis, or do not use the information to inform their teaching practice.

> One of the main obstacles to school improvement is that schools don't realise they are failing. A lot of schools don't know what they don't know. (Elaine Hines, School Trustees Association)

> Teachers often don't have very good data collection skills and data analysis skills—and often they rely on what they sit around and talk about and think, rather than actually using the data. (Kay Hawk, teacher educator)

> We've become preoccupied with pumping out data, but as one school said to me, 'We can produce the data, but we don't know how to analyse it or how to use it', and when you look at the data you can see why. Data collection is often out of control, it's flawed data, it's superficial data, it's bereft of good critical judgement right from its inception. (Lester Flockton, academic)

Flockton argued that, "There are some really good systems of examining, assessing, evaluating, reporting, and giving feedback." To make the best use of the data collected, he considered that schools should work towards "developing the level of critical analysis to critically analyse what we do and then to advance, based on the information we've got on the needs of our own particular students, and how useful and relevant it's going to be for a particular child or a particular group of students."

Most emphasised that there needs to be a clear purpose to assessment, it should be of high quality, and it should be "parsimonious".

What processes enable schools to make effective use of assessment data? A number of ideas were raised:

- undertaking an ongoing cycle of objective setting, planning, and evaluation

  > You'll need a formal plan, because when you are working with people everything doesn't happen through the delights of spontaneous combustion. Planning needs to recognise complexity and allow for the unforeseen. (Lester Flockton, academic)

- talking about assessment data and teaching and learning with the wider teaching team
- having a school-wide approach

  > It's a process that's about self-reflection, about starting to use the data you've got to improve your classroom programmes. So it's a matter of becoming quite self-aware about where you're at currently, and then having a concerted school-wide strategy for moving on that. (Jacky Burgon, Ministry of Education)

- accessing specialists
- engaging students in what they think and experience
- accessing examples from other schools

  > In NEMP, one of the things that the teachers who have worked with us for six weeks comment on most are the benefits and insights that come from having visited various schools. (Lester Flockton, academic)

- communicating with parents about assessments

> I'd expect to see senior people in the school with responsibilities for school-wide assessment. I'd expect to see good systems in place for collecting and recording and using that data; a school that did not accept unquestioningly that the teachers knew their students, particularly in terms of achievement; teachers who were increasingly comfortable with asking each other about how they helped their students to learn. And went in and out of classrooms, who were comfortable with discussing that, again in the light of information and data. I'd expect to see schools engaging lots of people in the community, with the Ministry, consultants outside, to help it do that. And a school that's not afraid to say to its community and to its own staff, 'helping our kids reach achievement targets is our number one priority', and that priority helps that school decide that it can't do everything; and there are certain things that are taken off the agenda so that the teachers can focus on the core business. (Viviane Robinson, academic)

Clarity about goals and good communication were perceived as preventing mismatches in the expectations of different groups, and contributing to greater understanding and support for the work of the school.

Data in Relation to School Vision and Goals

Most thought that a school vision, explicit school goals and planning to translate these into action were necessary for schools to **sustain** school improvement and action. There was a consistent view that these should be "owned" by the school, not imposed on it or derived from another school. The vision, goals, and action need to be in synchronisation with each other.

> Often the board "purchases" the vision. The board allows the principal to do this, but the vision should have come from the community. The board shouldn't say 'Write a vision for our school' when they are appointing the principal. (Elaine Hines, School Trustees Association)

> I think the culture of the school has to be right for school improvement. It has to be developed in line with the vision and philosophy. (Judy Hanna, principal)

> Some schools pick up the rhetoric. For example, 'we want to develop learners for life', and then contradict this in the nature of the curriculum or the way it's delivered. (Lester Flockton, academic)

Most discussed issues about how to translate vision and goals into practice, and how to evaluate or review progress in relation to them. The nature of self-review was portrayed by most participants as a reflective and analytical process.

> It is ongoing continuous improvement as part of your culture. That's through a review process, carefully evaluating what you are doing and why. Asking the question, 'Why are we doing this?' And being able to give a defensible account of the professional decisions that you are making. (Marilyn Gwilliam, principal)

> It has a high reflective and critical analysis dimension on how the school's practices and procedures are actually impacting on the learning of the individual student, and whether the strategies for addressing weaknesses and opportunities are in place. (Lester Flockton, academic)

> In the broader sense of general development, it's based on the sense however you arrive at it, that you could or ought to be doing better, and you sit down and figure out what it is that you ought to be doing better, how you are going to do that, and how you are going to tell whether you are doing that or not at the end of it. (Graeme Marshall, Ministry of Education)

The participants identified key elements of useful school-wide review. The elements had a great deal in common with key elements of useful student assessment. They were that the review:

- had a purpose;
- used data collection and analysis;
- resulted in useful changes or insights;
- involved all groups within the school and the wider community;
- was evaluated independently.

Two participants made the point that adequate time for reviewing was necessary to prevent the review from being superficial, and one said that time for change was necessary.

There were differences in emphasis on whether the purpose of review should be set by the school or through a national benchmark.

> Some kind of benchmark arrangements for schools to know what they should be striving for. Not just the performance of the students but a whole range of things, e.g., financial management, teaching practice etc. (Mike Hollings, Te Puni Kokiri)

> People must know where they are going. So you have to have some pretty clearly established goals in what you're doing. For us, we actually have a mission statement, which is: to be fully focused on learning. We have everybody committed to that ideal, going in that direction. (Peter Gunn, principal)

Participants thought that effective school-wide reviews should be based on goals, particularly about student learning, and analysis of relevant data in respect to those goals. This process of data collection and analysis was portrayed as ongoing and collaborative.

> For example, just the other day one school said to me, 'By the time they leave our junior school, three years there, we expect them to all be reading at or above their chronological age.' Now that's easy enough to monitor. It's what we do all the time. If they're not, then the systems swing into place to see why not, and what we're going to do about it. (Mary Hill, teacher educator)

> We don't call them schooling improvement projects, but that's what they are. Teachers are forever looking at themselves, looking to do things better. We look at what's happening, gather data through different ways, survey teachers, we look in classrooms, we talk to children. We find out what is happening and then the senior team sits down and we work out what we're going to do about it. It does not start and finish within a year, it can continue on. (Judy Hanna, principal)

Review and analysis should result in useful changes or insights. A culture of "no blame", and interest in critique and improvement were regarded as helpful conditions in motivating the school community to want to make change. Participants thought it was important to incorporate different viewpoints from the whole school community into reviews.

> There has to be a culture of change and agreeing that things need to be looked at and we can do things better. So we are constantly in the process of review and improvement. If you do it right, teachers are excited by it. (Judy Hanna, principal)

> Board, principal, staff—all three need to be working through that self-review process which asks, 'What have we done? Did we achieve it? What was good, what was bad, how do we recycle that back through the system and take it on to the next step and come quietly up the hill?' Then you do get to the point where you can do without an ERO. (Chris France, School Trustees Association)

> I don't think self-review planning should be done by the principal and the management of the school, independent of all of the other key people. (Ministry of Education)

> There has to be a shared vision. Don't leave the children out of the loop. (Judy Hanna, principal)

The Ministry of Education thought an independent evaluation provided a useful check and broader stimulation.

> Self-review is great, but that needs to be endorsed by someone or something that's independent of you and the school environment. So that causes you to reflect on that independent evaluation as well as your own self-review. (Ministry of Education)

Change was portrayed as taking place over an extended period of time. Raising student achievement takes years, not months.

> We don't acknowledge how long it takes to effect change. And if you're looking at trying to sustain improved student achievement, or significantly raise student achievement, you can't do that overnight. So people often go into these kinds of processes, thinking it can happen within a year. The simple facts of the matter are that it's unlikely to happen within a year. (Ministry of Education)

At the core of these statements is the shared belief that it is the attitudes and capacity of the school to learn and respond to information (internal and external) about its own performance which is at the heart of school improvement. There need to be processes in place to enable this learning, and conditions (time, setting) for it to occur.

Professional Development

Most thought that the capacity of staff to learn and respond to information about students' learning needs to be built and supported. Most participants singled out professional development for school staff as an essential condition for enduring school improvement, although they gave different emphases to types of professional development. "Access to professional development" was a frequent answer to the question of what three things would make the greatest difference to helping schools improve. While some participants, mainly principals, said there needed to be professional development opportunities for all staff, including support staff, most highlighted the kinds of opportunities that need to be available to teaching staff and principals.

Professional development for teachers and principals fell into five main categories:

- mutual support through clustering and mentoring schemes;
- opportunities for reflective discussion about teaching and learning;
- access to research, readings, and exemplars of practice;
- access to good advisory services;
- formal professional development opportunities.

Clustering and Mentoring

Principals, teacher educators, and officials identified the value of clustering and mentoring schemes, although views about these were different for each group.

Principals emphasised the value of collegial support from other principals.

> In my experience of working with principals, they identify really strongly with their local cluster and are really proud of their clusters and seem to have good collegial support from their clusters. We have a very special relationship, because I think unless you've actually been a principal, you don't actually understand the conflict and the tensions, the pressures and the worries. You share so many issues in common. (Marilyn Gwilliam, principal)

Principals and teacher educators highlighted the help that can be provided through mentoring schemes and discussion groups. David Stewart (New Zealand Principals and Leadership Centre), who is intensively involved in principal training and mentoring, advocated a government commitment to putting time and resources into discussion groups. He thought that discussion, focus, or mentor groups should be available to every school principal who wanted them.

Ministry of Education officials involved in school support or research thought that clustering can help schools by providing pooled expertise, especially where expertise is limited. Clustering around administration, special education, and information technology were examples that they gave. Teacher educators/researchers Jan Hill and Kay Hawk also said there seem to be benefits for some schools in clustering arrangements. They warned, however, that it is critical for schools to feel they have control over the clustering process. "If it is imposed or the management of it is imposed, the result can be less than positive."

Reflective Practice

There was support from teacher educators, principals, schools sector organisation representatives, Ministry of Education, Treasury, and Teacher Registration Board officials for the notion that in a school which is "improving", teachers and principals need to be reflective practitioners, not taking their own practice for granted, and engaged in thinking and talking about educational ideas, teaching, and learning.

Associated with this came a call for a literate workforce of teachers, who read widely and keep up to date with educational research. These themes were elaborated by the teacher educators in particular. They incorporated a number of ideas:

- the value of teachers working together or as individuals to deepen their understanding of teaching and learning;
- the importance of getting and analysing feedback on new initiatives and the effectiveness of new initiatives;
- keeping up to date with reading and research benefits teaching practice;
- the value of linking theory and practice;
- the value of critically examining practices in other schools, and asking whether and how these could be applied in one's own school.

Teacher educators and the Te Puni Kokiri representative noted the importance of teachers' pedagogical knowledge. Teachers need sound knowledge of teaching and learning, and content knowledge.

> If the teacher doesn't know how learning takes place, or doesn't know about, for example, the science they're teaching, if they're just following the plan or the recipe, and they don't notice the child is on the wrong track or has a misconception, then they don't know how to work on it. (Mary Hill, teacher educator)

There may be tangible signs that a school has a reflective culture and shares ideas.

> If teachers are achieving success and are supported and encouraged to do that, they will really be happy to talk about it. If you go into a staff room at playtime or lunchtime, and the teachers are telling dominant stories about what happened in their classrooms, that's improvement. (Judy Hanna, principal)

> A good school to me is people who are continually reading about new things, talking about new things, sharing them in the classroom . . . a school that has staff meetings that are very professionally focused. That are looking at what else is happening out there, not just looking at it, not just trying to bring it into their school, but saying and asking, 'How can that apply to our school?' (Murray Gadd, teacher educator)

Underneath these ideas, and the notion of the teacher as reflective practitioner, was an understanding that teaching itself is not a mechanistic process, but involves intellectual engagement, risk taking, and passion.

If we accept the value of reflective practice, what conditions are needed to support it? One of the Ministry of Education officials raised questions about the systems in which we work, and the extent to which they act against professional independence.

> A system that encourages people to take a few risks. And I worry that the model we have at the moment, the convergent forces are stronger than the divergent. That's what I thought looking at secondary curriculum innovation. People were saying they were surprised there wasn't more innovation in secondary schools, but if you line up the forces of convergence in the system, you shouldn't be surprised that they are trying to do much the same thing....There seems to be a lot of punishment in the New Zealand system, or a sense that there is punishment if you step out of line professionally, take risks, any number of people waiting to leap on you if you do. And curiously that was something I picked up in the Beeby[14] biography. Even when the curriculum invites people to just use it as a guideline, people are very anxious to get close support from supporting documentation. 'I just want to teach. I don't want to think about teaching.' And sometimes that may spill out from the fact that people are working very hard, and sometimes too hard and don't have time to think about what they are doing, or sit down with their colleagues and talk about what they are doing. Swap notes. Swap ideas in a professional kind of way. (Graeme Marshall, Ministry of Education)

One of the two Māori participants focused on some of the outcomes for Māori students of teachers being critical thinkers, and becoming aware of their attitudes and expectations about Māori students, and how students experience the school's cultural environment.

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[14] Alcorn, N. (1999). *To the fullest extent of his powers: C.E. Beeby's life in education.* Wellington: Victoria University Press.

> I think there's a whole lot of things that teachers do unwittingly that cause Māori kids to fail. There's some attitudinal things and teachers need to be made aware of that. I think many have low expectations. If they're aware that they do have these expectations and attitudinal problems, I think they can make a big difference to Māori kids. The fact that many non-Māori teachers don't have a relationship with Māori communities. They don't have a bad relationship, they just don't have a relationship. They don't have cultural congruence with the students they are working with. I know that Courtenay Cazden has done some work on this, and notes things like the quality and quantity of interaction of non-Māori teachers with Māori kids is quite different from those with people with whom they feel culturally congruent. If we don't feel good about ourselves, if we think the teacher doesn't like you, then it's harder for you to learn. A whole lot of other expectations. Kids' expectations of themselves. Non-Māori expectations of Māori kids. I got the feeling often that there was an expectation in a mixed class of Māori and non-Māori kids that the non-Māori kids expected the Māori kids to be the skylarks and naughty kids. And so it is a kind of self-fulfilling negative expectation. (Mike Hollings, Te Puni Kokiri)

What conditions could support teachers to become reflective practitioners? The following ideas were mentioned:

- leadership that values and model critical thinking;
- discussion and investigation;
- time within the school day and at staff meetings for meaningful examination of educational issues;
- access to a range of up-to-date relevant research written for the classroom teacher.

Advisory Services

Availability and quality of advice and support for schools was seen as an important area of professional support. During the 1990s, the advisory service became contestable. Colleges and schools of education, in many cases, restructured their services to manage under the new population-based funding and contestability. Other services, not under the umbrella of these institutions, were developed. Three key issues were raised: access to advice and support, quality of advice and support, and the need for specialist advice and support for primary teachers.

> No school can be certain of curriculum support when they most need it, even for the basic subjects. The advisory service is fragmented. (Carol Parker, NZEI Te Riu Roa)

> I'm a great supporter of a strong advisory support service, but you need people in those services who are very very high quality people. A science advisor who is very knowledgeable about science, but is also very knowledgeable about pedagogy. How you take people from where they are at to another step in their knowledge and practice. And because in the primary school . . . the particular

> people are generalists by definition, to expect every teacher to be a scientist, a musician and everything else is quite frankly unrealistic. So they need to have access to support, they need to have access to good resources . . . There is so much out there now, a grab bag and there is a temptation to dip in willy nilly. (Lester Flockton, academic)

Identification of Professional Development Needs

Several people commented that professional development needs to relate to the goals of the school, or to specific aims for individuals or areas of teaching, and that professional development may need to be sustained over quite a long period of time. One idea was that schools should be looking at three-year professional development cycles in any one particular professional development area.

> So if you're looking at mathematics you spend a year reviewing, a year doing something different, implementing whatever on the basis of outcomes of the review, you monitor it and make sure it's bedded in and so on. (Kay Hawk, teacher educator)

Another teacher educator stressed that change needs to happen in a manageable way.

Leadership and Management

Effective leadership, especially by the principal, was highlighted as a key to school improvement and sustaining improvement over time.

What is Leadership?

The principals in our study described leadership as:

- building good relationships with parents, board members, staff, and community;
- taking control of the educational direction of the school and having an educational vision;
- setting a model to others through the leader's own behaviour, teaching, and attitudes;
- recognising attributes in others and encouraging these to flourish.

Similar attributes for an effective leader were identified by the Teacher Registration Board representative. He thought that an effective leader would be an "able educationalist" who knows about teaching and learning, and applies that in his/her own work, who can identify and define areas of need, who motivates teachers, provides resources for teachers, and "negotiates some of the hard stuff that goes on in the community".

A teacher educator thought:

> Being a good principal involves four things: 50 percent good people skills, 45 percent common sense, 5 percent knowledge, and the fourth thing wraps the whole thing together, which is a passion for learning and a passion for kids learning. (Murray Gadd, teacher educator)

One of the academics did not equate leadership with principalship alone. Lester Flockton distinguished two main dimensions of effective leadership. One was "leadership literacy". He described the "3 As" of leadership literacy as "access, analysis, and advancement".

> Access: The ability to access knowledge and know how to learn from and use knowledge. A lot of that is intuitive and should not be undervalued.
> Analysis: This refers to being able to analyse your knowledge in terms of how it fits within your institution, and how it is going to meet the needs of the child.
> Advancement: This is advancing the interests of the learner, based on an informed analysis of knowledge. Leaders are then not so dependent on instructions from 'up the line' or 'on what some contractor deliverer might tell them'. They exercise a strong sense of professionalism and autonomy of thought. (Lester Flockton, teacher educator)

He described the second dimension as "leadership intelligence". This is both cognitive intelligence and behavioural intelligence—relating in appropriate ways to people so people see you as a valued significant other. A good leader understands "the nature and the soul" of the school.

Recruitment, Appointment, and Training of Principals

The role of principals was seen as so important that most of our principals, school organisation representatives, one of our Ministry of Education officials, and one of the teacher educators/researchers singled out the value of independent advice to boards on principal appointment.

> I think the appointment of principals being left to the board is a real worry. You have got a group of parents who could be the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker appointing principals. That is fundamentally incredibly flawed. Most now invite other principals to be involved. (Marilyn Gwilliam, principal)

> In my opinion, schools should appoint the teaching staff, but they should not appoint their principals. In my opinion, you muck that appointment up and so many mistakes come from it. They should be involved with the appointment, but there should be a professional input from either the Ministry of Education or an education board that ensures they have made a sound choice. (Bruce Adin, NZEI Te Riu Roa)

> If a board of trustees would have enough wisdom to acknowledge, 'Look, this is the most important job we'll ever do, so let's get someone who could actually guide us through this process.' (Pat Lynch, Association of Proprietors of Integrated Schools)

> Someone to intervene more in the appointment of leader process. A weakness is we allow boards, because we champion self-management, to make those decisions frequently without any external references, any guidance. (Jim Douglas, Ministry of Education)

> The issue of leadership is critical. Better processes to identify potential leaders, train potential leaders, and equip leaders. Now we are totally reliant on people organising themselves into their own training on this. (Peter Gunn, principal)

But the principals also acknowledged the essential roles of all staff. Making good appointments and getting the "right staffing mix" were regarded as important. While a level of staff stability was seen to be necessary to provide a sound base, new staff members also brought fresh ideas and outlook.

Some principals and teacher educators drew attention to pressures on schools from inadequate teacher supply. Two examples were the shortage of New Zealand trained teachers in 1998, and the inability to attract and retain suitably qualified teachers in some low decile, rural, and small town schools. A teacher educator told of a struggling small school principal who was only a second year teacher himself, and whose other teacher was an untrained reliever with Limited Authority to Teach.

Some national Ministry of Education officials and the Business Roundtable representative thought steps should be taken to ensure a good "fit" between the skills of people in the school and the changing needs of the school. This view seemed to imply that school improvement was primarily about fundamental "change".

> And self-improvement, school improvement, change management is quite a stressful and time consuming task. And people sometimes burn out, and sometimes at different stages in the process you need people with different skills, to carry on. (Ministry of Education)

What steps were proposed to ensure a good "fit"? One was to make a conscious effort to plan for succession. Another involved ideas of replacement of key staff to fit with the needs of the school. The Business Roundtable representative said that school-based research emphasised the importance of inter alia, educational leadership by the principal and co-operation among staff. Thus a principal needed to be able to group around him or her teachers who shared the school's vision.

A Ministry of Education official described, but said he did not necessarily support, the view that the way to improve a school is "to actually sack the principal and get new staff", on the basis that different staff would make a difference to the students.

Workload

The work of primary school principals was recognised as demanding. The principals in our study all singled out dealing with excessive workload as one measure to help sustain school improvement. New policy requirements that "just fall out of the sky", compliances, and annual reporting on issues to a multiplicity of agencies were seen as diverting schools from their goals. To an extent, the size of the school, the experience of the principal, and the school's capacity to deal with the unexpected was regarded as a factor in dealing with workload. It was pointed out that principals of small schools are not able to delegate and share responsibility as those of large schools can, so one person is having to handle many tasks.

Property was portrayed as a major area of work for principals who may not have resource people to help with property decision making.

> I think in those small schools, those principals have to very quickly establish some skills for themselves about managing their time, putting to one side the pieces of paper that need attention during the weekend, or that night, or some other time when the children are not there. (Geoff Lovegrove, NZ Principals' Federation)

Ministry of Education officials also had concerns about principals' workloads. They highlighted:

- the variety and complex nature of tasks undertaken by principals;
- the absence of suitable training or minimum standards of professional skills;
- the impact of turnover of principalships in a small country with 2700 schools, recruitment to principal positions is an ongoing need;
- workload pressures on teaching principals.

Principals in low decile, rural, and small schools were perceived to face stronger workload pressures than others. Some pressures are outside the control of individual principals, and raise questions about the relationship of schools to government, and the costs and benefits of self-managing schools. Should schools manage their own property? Both Ministry of Education officials and principals raised questions about this.

> We oblige boards to act as if they virtually own the school buildings rather than being the renters of those buildings. If you think about the difference between owning and renting—people who rent their buildings ring up the landlord when things need fixing or changing. That's why most businesses don't own, they want to get on with their business, not with repairing windows and organising painters. Why do we expect schools to operate in a different way? The answer is that many school boards and communities think that their school is defined more by the school's buildings than by the quality of educational services being delivered within those buildings. (Martin Connelly, Ministry of Education)

One of the principals thought the principal should make property decisions.

> Property decisions should be ours because others may not make them in an educationally sound manner. Property plays an important part in school operations and I want to be sure that the property is exactly right for the way the curriculum is delivered at our school. (Judy Hanna, principal)

One conclusion is that schools cannot operate alone. There are different views as to what is needed in the way of support, at least in terms of property, which could be catered for by having a system where support is available for schools when they want it.

The Roles of Communities

There were three ways in which the roles of communities in relation to school improvement were depicted:

- a "partnership" in respect to school planning and strategies;
- a source of tension when relations between communities and the board or principal are not smooth;
- the contribution that communities can make to education if people are encouraged to be involved in meaningful ways.

Ministry of Education officials commented on the need for strong relationships with different groups in the community, with respect to school governance, planning, and self-review. Their view was that where there are communities that are made up of particular ethnic groups, or large percentages of different ethnic groups, then the school needs to find a way for those groups to contribute to self-review and strategic planning.

Nine of the participants thought that community and school relationships could be a source of tension. Parents and community having unrealistic expectations, making unrealistic demands and/or having poor or incomplete understanding could create problems, according to them. However, none of the currently practising principals pinpointed these relationships as being a source of tension.

Only three people elaborated on how communities could strengthen education in their schools. Two of these were Māori participants. Wally Penetito (academic) thought that local knowledge about Māori history, language, and culture needs to be taught in schools. This requires involvement of local whanau, hapu, and iwi to decide what should be available and how it should be accessed. Carol Parker, NZEI Te Riu Roa, said that isolated communities that have had school closures may have lost the concept of a "community" school; low decile, rural and small town isolated schools often struggle to get good staff. She thought that shared governance and leadership (as proposed in the Education Amendment Bill No 2) could potentially contribute to a further loss of feeling of community responsibility and community ownership.

What Three Things Would Make the Greatest Difference in Helping Schools to Improve?

We asked participants what three things they thought would make the greatest difference in helping schools to improve. There were some noticeable key differences in the views of specific groups of participants, which seemed to reflect their own involvement in schools.

The "things that would make the greatest difference" that were most commonly mentioned by principals were:

- adequate resourcing—staffing, curriculum resources, and funding (5);
- a strong principal/identify, train and equip principals (4);
- staff development (3).

These items revealed a pragmatic concern for work within schools to build a good staff team and be adequately resourced to do this. They imply a view of school improvement as ongoing school development.

Those most frequently mentioned by national Ministry of Education and Treasury officials were:

- understanding of what school improvement is (4);
- commitment to self-review/clear assessment goals/understanding how to assess (3);
- building links with the community (3).

These items focused on the process of school improvement and of making changes, and linked with Ministry of Education views, already stated, that communities need to contribute to self-review and planning.

The items most frequently mentioned by academics, teacher educators, and researchers were about conditions to support professional development:

- in-service teacher education/staff development (8);
- access to funding related to identified areas when it is needed (2);
- resources to enable schools to be reflective and analytic (1).

Regional Ministry of Education, Teacher Registration Board, and Te Puni Kokiri representatives had views that were more similar to academics/researchers/teacher educators, namely:

- professional development/good models (3);
- effective leadership (2);
- good communications with communities (1);
- encouragement of risk taking and swapping ideas (1);
- resources (1).

School sector organisation representatives tended to have views related to their constituency; for example, the School Trustees Association emphasised board training, co-ordinated support, and willingness to ask for help, and NZEI emphasised professional development, teacher conditions, class size, and resourcing.

The New Zealand Business Roundtable representative pinpointed:

- equal funding for all schools, private and state, on an enrolment basis and school-based decision making;
- monitoring the performance of students and regular and high-quality information to parents;
- parental choice of school.

8. CONCLUSION

This report has described case studies of ten schools selected as improving schools and views about school improvement. The study shows school improvement in reality, not as a neat formula that any school can pick up or adapt, but as experienced and situated within local and national contexts. The case study schools are good lively schools, but inevitably none were perfect. The analysis of practices and processes taking place within the schools, and the perspectives of the 32 key school sector personnel raise issues about the purpose and nature of schools, teaching and learning, and the role of government in respect to schools. Exploration of these issues contributes to thinking about how to shape the future of schools, and raises questions for policy and practice.

We found almost universal agreement that improving the learning and achievement of individuals and groups of students is the basis of school improvement. Learning is defined broadly as skills, attitudes, and knowledge. Literacy and numeracy are important objectives, but most participants believe, like Durie (2001, p.4), that schools have responsibilities to contribute to wider goals, so that students are able to "actively participate as 'citizens of the world'" from a strong base of self-identity and knowledge of their world.

A central message is that schools need to build goals for themselves in relation to their own individual students and communities. In schools that were steadily developing, teachers knew their students well, held strong beliefs that all students could learn and be successful, and had high expectations for every student. Social difficulties were not used as an excuse for low achievement. The schools believed they could make a difference.

Schools that were steadily developing had an analytic and openly thoughtful culture with students' interests at the heart. They applied rigorous efforts across the whole school to develop common benchmarks, analyse student learning, and evaluate teaching in order to improve student learning. Analysis was a feature of many aspects of school operation, applied to teaching and learning, behavioural standards, school environment, and school policy: it was not done only at formal review times, or within a senior management team. There was an emphasis on processes to generate school development and school culture.

Therefore what works in schools and classrooms is not able to be prescribed. The schools that were making teaching and learning the core focus of their work were creating their own goals, pedagogical practices, and assessment processes from analysis of strengths and weaknesses and the achievements of their students. This creation and re-creation was not an ineffective duplication of work, since in this way all staff gained common and deeper understanding and beliefs that could be harnessed to their own work. They learned from each other, making use of expertise and developing skills through a variety of ways—observation, mentoring, feedback, and professional development. There was not a single "right way".

Other features of schools that were steadily developing were:

- the generation of a "learning community" where everyone was encouraged to see themselves as learners and take a critical approach to their own learning;
- effective leadership, with a key role being played by the principal and senior management staff.

Conditions and systems to support schools can be provided within schools themselves and by external organisations and government agencies. Conditions are strengthened when there is consistency and connection between the internal and external systems and support.

Teachers' creation of goals, pedagogical practices, and assessment processes were supported by:

- regular opportunities during school weeks for teachers to talk with other teachers about teaching and learning;
- teachers keeping up to date with and discussing research and educational ideas;
- professional development, including school-wide professional development, as a core condition of work for all school staff;
- schools having contact with "outsiders" who had expertise and knowledge, and who brought new ideas and perspectives;
- teachers working with other teachers to observe, analyse, and discuss their teaching practice.

Schools can place priority on reflective discussion through a range of ways, e.g.:

- re-organising the agenda of staff meetings so that more time can be spent in professional discussion, with some other matters being handled in other forums or by other means;
- making planning and expenditure on professional development an ongoing priority for the school;
- using the skills of each teacher within the programme of professional development and analysis of practice.

But schools cannot create conditions to support reflective practice on their own. Teachers would benefit by having the kinds of conditions available in collective agreements to support reflective practice, such as opportunity for paid release time to enable them to work with others, access to sabbatical and study leave. Schools need access to outsiders—curriculum advisers, resource teachers, academics, teacher educators, mentors to provide professional support as well as others for specific needs. "The deeper problems of schooling have to do with teacher isolation and the fact that teachers don't often have access to other people who know what they're doing when they teach and who can help them do it better" (Eisner, 2001, p. 369).

Relevant professional development needs to be available to all schools. Access to professional development occurring over a period of one or two years was a feature of the schools that showed steady development. The schools demonstrated that professional development based on identification of school needs, involving the whole school, and addressing teachers' content knowledge as well as pedagogical practice, was particularly beneficial in contributing to changed teaching and learning. Some Ministry of Education contracts, e.g., professional development associated with SEMO, and Literacy and Numeracy Enhancement Projects were highlighted as being very valuable. However, the current system of professional development contracts set in areas of government priority will not cater for all needs or enable all schools to have access. The study found a low priority given to some curriculum areas, e.g., science where there was no uptake of professional development by most schools.

Hawk, Hill, and Taylor (2001) believe that schools must find ways to make sure that teachers gain more than professional knowledge, that professional development needs to change practice and be linked to outcomes for students. Some professional development projects in New Zealand have been the subject of research evaluations, but the research component needs to be built into all professional development contracts. Teachers also need access to useful and clearly communicated New Zealand based research.

The study showed a struggle for some schools to select and use assessment tools appropriately, and interpret and use data for student learning. Some schools needed a greater understanding of assessment, access to a range of assessment tools and knowledge of how to use and communicate about these. The Education Standards Act 2001 requires school charters to have a new section from 2003 setting out goals for student achievement for the next 3–5 years, improvement targets for the current year, and the activities the school plans to reach its strategic goals (Ministry of Education, 2001). In primary schools, the task of measuring change in student achievement given small numbers of students at each age level, natural variation occurring with each year's intake, and aspects of curriculum which do not lend themselves to easy measures is complex. How schools cope with the new planning and reporting framework, and whether they get the help they need will be examined when we return to the schools in 2004.

Government intervention can offer schools a platform from which to build, or a prescription to which they have to adhere. Ministry of Education officials were struggling with ways to "get the partnership right" between themselves, ERO, and schools, and had moved away from the pure self-management philosophy that was evident in the early to mid 1990s. They were keen to support beneficial linkages among schools, and between schools, government agencies, and ministries. However, there was a predominant focus on the "safety net" aspect of their work, on assisting schools to self-review, and on encouraging communities and boards to adopt responsibilities that had been prescribed for them.

Those involved in the work of schools on a regular basis identified ways in which schools could be strongly supported. These included sufficient resourcing and funding, reducing workload, removing irrelevant paper work, and improving communication and consultation. Staff in some schools had extra heavy workloads:

- schools at the cutting edge of educational change, where teachers needed to keep abreast of new learning and showcase this for other schools;

- schools which are turning around, and are working to cope with a myriad of issues. These could range from low morale, a poor public image, student behaviour, unattractive school environment, poor systems and policies, as well as improving student achievement. Often, in the first instance the workload fell especially on the principal and senior management;
- schools with small rolls, where there was a smaller pool of staff to call on, and progress seemed dependent on key personnel. Where staff left, expertise needed to be rebuilt;
- schools which had considerable poverty and transience. In these schools, extra efforts were needed to fund-raise for basic curriculum activities, and transient students were achieving less well than other students.

Wylie (1998) suggested that for positive change to occur in schools, educational principles should underpin educational systems and policy. She said that to "move to a system where learning and capacity building is at the centre, we need to increase the linkages between schools and government departments, to have real dialogue" (p. 89). This study reinforced this view. One implication is the importance of policy makers consulting with practitioners about their experiences and needs. The themes coming through this study point to the need for a strong role to be played by government in offering the kinds of resources and guidance that enable all schools to be effective learning organisations, continually improving.

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APPENDIX 1

WHAT MAKES A GOOD SCHOOL?

From Wylie, C & Chalmers A. (1999). *Future schooling in Palmerston North: Views and experiences of parents, students, principals, teachers and trustees. Report to the Ministry of Education.* Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

There's no single recipe for a good school. Research overseas identifies these major ingredients:

- A clear focus on learning and achievement.
  All learning time is used for learning. Classrooms are calm, and students are attentive. Lessons start on time, and there are no interruptions.

- High expectations of every student to achieve.
  Students make progress. They have many opportunities to perform well and to take responsibility in different ways.

- Students enjoy learning. They feel challenged, and confident.

- Learning resources are engaging, and match students' learning needs.
  Where information technology is used, it develops new skills and understandings.

- Students get clear, quick, and useful feedback on their work, including homework.

- Teachers, students, and parents respect and support one another.

- There is good communication between teachers and parents.
  Parents have a clear picture of their child's progress. Parents take part in their children's learning, e.g. through monitoring homework.

- Teachers, students, and parents believe in the value of education.

- Teachers, students, and parents have shared understandings of what the school is about, have a common purpose, and a sense of community.

- The school is welcoming to students and parents

- The school is a pleasant place to work for students and teachers.

- The school is a safe place. There is little bullying.
  Students help develop fair codes of conduct for themselves.
  Discipline is maintained by an emphasis on "belonging and participating".

- Students are praised for their achievements, including attendance and behaviour.

APPENDIX 2

Letter To School Principals Inviting Participation

7 August 2001

«Principal_First» «Principal_Surname»
The Principal
«School»
«Add1»
«Add2»
«City»

Dear «Principal_First»

SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT RESEARCH PROJECT

This letter is to follow up on our recent telephone conversation about your possible participation in research being carried out by NZCER. This letter describes in more detail the aims of the project, and what the school's participation would mean. We would appreciate if you could share this letter with your staff and the Board of Trustees as you see fit.

The New Zealand Council for Educational Research is undertaking a research project on how New Zealand primary schools improve and change over time. In the first phase we interviewed key people in educational agencies and organisations to see what they understood as sustainable school improvement. Our intention was to expand our understanding of the factors involved in sustainable school improvement, and to see whether there was a common understanding of school improvement in schools and the external agencies and organisations that support or frame their work.

The second phase will involve a set of case studies of ten primary and intermediate schools. We asked people in the first phase to help us identify schools that have engaged in positive school change and development over the last 2 to 5 years. Your school was suggested to us as an example of a school which has been recognised as one which is learning, changing, and developing in positive ways.

If you agree to participate, we would like to find out more about the ways in which your school has been developing. We would seek to identify the processes and factors which established the culture of leadership, learning and change in your school, and then return at some later date to gain information on how such improvement can be sustained over time.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this request. I will ring you within two weeks to follow up.

Yours sincerely,

Marie Cameron
Senior Researcher

APPENDIX 3

CASE STUDY INTERVIEW SCHEDULES AND QUESTIONNAIRES

Principal's Interview 1

Why did you apply to be principal of this school?
Change in the school and leadership and management

Change

1. What do you see as the most significant changes that have happened in this school over the last 3 or 4 years?
    - changes in people
    - changes in ways of doing things
2. How did these changes come about?
3. What was their impact in the school?
    - impact on principal
    - impact on teaching staff
    - impact on organisation
    - impact on students
    - impact on the school environment
4. What major achievements have there been in the past 3-4 years?
5. What major challenges have there been in the past 3-4 years?
6. What changes external to the school have had an impact on the school over the last 3 or 4 years?
7. What was their impact?
    - on principal
    - on the work of the school
    - on families, children etc.
8. Thinking back over the past 3-4 years, if you could have your time over again are there any things you would do differently? (If yes, please describe.)

Leadership & Management

9. What are the key strategic goals of this school?
10. How are they identified?

- Who is involved?
- In what ways does the school consult with its community about goals and policies?

11. What is the role of the BOT in this school?

12. Can you briefly describe the organisational structures in this school?

    - what are the main roles and responsibilities of these people?
    - describe how the school timetables and groups classes, students and reasons for the timetabling and grouping
    - how were these decisions on timetabling and grouping made?

13. Could you select one important goal of your school and describe how it is being translated into practice in the school?

    - Why was this goal chosen?
    - Who chose it? Who participated in the decision?
    - What information was used to select it and to guide future decisions?
    - Who has responsibility for seeing that it is addressed?
    - Who is involved in the implementation?
    - What are the implementation steps?
    - How do you know that the goal is being achieved?
    - How do others learn about the impact of efforts to achieve the goal?
    - What are the next steps?
    - What information do you give to the BOT about progress towards achievement of goals?

14. Is the process you've described for this goal the same process you use for other school goals?

    - what differences are there, and why?

15. What records does your school keep which might help in tracking the progress it is making?
    How do you use these records?

16. How does the process of self review work in your school?
    - How do you use the perspectives of others in your school self-review?
    - How do ERO reviews link with your school self-review?

Thank you.

Principal's Interview 2

Values, Learning and Teaching

Own Values and Philosophy

1. What are your own beliefs about the purposes of education?
2. What do you think are the most important things for students to learn in school?

School Values & Philosophy

3. What is your understanding of what your school really values? What really matters in this school?
4. How have these values been developed?
5. How are these values reflected in what happens in this school?
6. How would you describe the culture of your school?
    - what makes it "tick"?
    - what processes and relationships underpin the work of the school?
    - can you think of any examples which show how this culture operates in the everyday life of the school?

Learning & Teaching

7. How would you describe the expectations for learning for students in this school?
    - your own expectations
    - school expectations
    - parent expectations
8. What approaches to learning appear to be successful in this school?
9. Over the past 3-4 years can you identify any developments in approaches to learning and teaching in classrooms in your school?
10. What has contributed to these developments?
11. What kind of information is collected on students' learning?
    - how is it decided what to collect?
    - why is this information collected?
    - what use is made of the information?
12. What processes are there for feedback to students about their learning?

13. What processes (opportunities and methods) are there for feedback to and from parents about their children's learning?
    - for parents to support and encourage children's learning?
    - to let parents know about how well their children are achieving?

14. What processes (opportunities and methods) are there for teachers to get feedback about their teaching?
    - are there ways that teachers learn from each other?

15. What opportunities are there for teachers to talk about teaching and learning?

Staff Development

16. In what ways does the school support and encourage on-going staff learning?

17. How are professional development priorities set in your school?

18. Can you describe a professional development initiative which you see as having had a positive impact on your own school?

19. Were you able to build on that initial impact? How?

20. What system of staff appraisal do you use in your school?

21. How do you use the professional standards for teachers?

22. How do you work with teachers whose performance is of concern?

23. What opportunities are there for classroom teachers to develop leadership skills?

24. What opportunities do you have to continue your own learning?

Outside Agencies

25. What outside agencies and people have an impact upon this school?

26. What outside agency involvement or people have been helpful to you?

27. What outside agency involvement or people have been less helpful?

28. Have ERO reports assisted you to develop and improve what is important in this school?

Finale

29. What do you enjoy most about working in this school?

30. What do you enjoy least about working in this school?

31. What major challenges lie ahead for this school?

32. Where do you see this school in another 3 years time?

33. Where do you see yourself in another 3 years time?

34. Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you would like to add?

THANK YOU!

Teachers Interview

---

1. Could you please start by telling me a little about your time at this school?

- what made you decide to apply for a job here?
- how long have you been here?
- what responsibilities do you have here? (e.g. class teacher, curriculum leader)

CHANGE

2. What do you see as the most significant changes that have happened in this school over the last 3 or 4 years?

- changes in people
- changes in ways of doing things

3. How did these changes come about?

4. What was their impact in the school? on your role

- on the work of the school
- on students

5. What major achievements have there been in the past 3-4 years?

6. What major challenges have there been in the past 3-4 years?

7. What changes external to the school have had an impact on the school over the last 3 or 4 years?

8. What was their impact?

- on your role
- on the work of the school
- on students

9. Thinking back over the past 3-4 years, if you could have your time over again are there any things you would do differently? (If yes, please describe.)

Own Values and Philosophy

10. What are your own beliefs about the purposes of education?

11. What do you think are the most important things for students to learn in school?

School Values & Philosophy

12. What is your understanding of what your school really values? What really matters in this school?

13. How have these values been developed?

14. How are these values reflected in what happens in this school?

15. How would you describe the culture of your school?

Learning & Teaching

16. How would you describe the expectations for learning for students in this school?

    - your own expectations
    - school expectations
    - parent expectations

17. What approaches to learning appear to be successful in this school?

18. Over the past 3-4 years can you identify any developments in approaches to learning and teaching in your classroom?

19. What has contributed to these developments?

20. How do you plan for children's learning?

    - where do you start?
    - what information do you use?
    - what resources do you use?
    - what involvement do you get from others?

21. What kind of information do you seek on children's learning?

    - how do you decide what to collect?
    - how is the information used?
    - how do you involve students in understanding how they are learning and achieving?

22. How are parents involved in the learning of their children?

23. What information do you share with parents about student achievement?

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

24. What processes (opportunities and methods) are there for teachers to get feedback on their teaching?
    - how has this worked for you?
    - are there other ways that you are able to learn from other teachers?
25. In what ways does the school support and encourage on-going learning?
26. What staff development is seen as most important?
27. What opportunities have you had to continue your own learning?
28. Can you describe a professional development initiative which you see as having had a positive impact on your own teaching?
29. Were you able to build on that initial impact?
30. How are teachers supported in this school when they need advice?
31. What opportunities are there for teachers to develop leadership skills?

OUTSIDE AGENCIES

32. What outside agencies have an impact upon this school?
33. What outside agency involvement has been helpful?
34. What outside agency involvement has been less helpful?
35. Have ERO reports had any impact on your teaching?

Finale

Finally -

36. What do you enjoy most about working in this school?
37. What do you enjoy least about working in this school?
38. What major challenges lie ahead for this school?
39. Where do you see this school in another 3 years time?
40. Where do you see yourself in another 3 years time?
41. Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you would like to add?

THANK YOU!

Questions for curriculum leader - literacy

1. Does your school have a written literacy vision?
2. How has this vision been developed?

   - how does it fit with other school visions, goals, and values?

3. What are the literacy goals for your school?

- what role did external information or advice play in the development of your schools vision and goals?
- what role did professional development funded by the Ministry of Education play in the development of your school's vision and goals?
- What role did professional development funded by the school play in the development of your school's vision and goals?

4. What actions has your school taken to achieve these goals?

- what was/is the role of professional development here?

5. Have these actions led to any changes in literacy teaching practice in the school?

   - If yes, please describe:

   - teaching methods
   - resources
   - assessment of student needs
   - assessment of student learning
   - evaluation of practice
   - organisation of classrooms/teachers
   - allocation of staff/funding
   - professional development
   - contact with other schools
   - use of Te Kete Ipurangi

6. Are there any changes in student learning and achievement which you can link to these changes?

   - If yes, please describe

7. What challenges lie ahead of you now?
8. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your role as literacy leader?

THANK YOU

Questions for curriculum leader - science

1. Does your school have a written science vision?
2. How has this vision been developed?

   - how does it fit with other school visions, goals, and values?

3. What are the science goals for your school?

- what role did external information or advice play in the development of your schools vision and goals?
- what role did professional development funded by the Ministry of Education play in the development of your school's vision and goals?
- What role did professional development funded by the school play in the development of your school's vision and goals?

4. What actions has your school taken to achieve these goals?

   - what was/is the role of professional development here?

5. Have these actions led to any changes in science teaching practice in the school?

   - If yes, please describe:

   - teaching methods
   - resources
   - assessment of student needs
   - assessment of student learning
   - evaluation of practice
   - organisation of classrooms/teachers
   - allocation of staff/funding
   - professional development
   - contact with other schools
   - use of Te Kete Ipurangi

6. Are there any changes in student learning and achievement which you can link to these changes?

   - If yes, please describe

7. What challenges lie ahead of you now?
8. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your role as science leader?

THANK YOU

Support Staff Interview

1. Could you please start by telling me a little about your time at this school?
    - what made you decide to apply for a job here?
    - how long have you been here?

CHANGE

2. What do you see as the most significant changes that have happened in this school over the last 3 or 4 years?
    - changes in people
    - changes in ways of doing things
3. How did these changes come about?
4. What was their impact in the school?
    - impact on organisation
    - impact on students
    - impact on board
    - impact on environment
    - impact on your role
5. What major achievements have there been in the past 3-4 years?
6. What major challenges have there been in the past 3-4 years?
7. What changes external to the school have had an impact on the school over the last 3 or 4 years?
8. What was their impact?
    - on the work of the school
    - on families, children etc.
9. Thinking back over the past 3-4 years, if you could have your time over again are there any things you would do differently? (If yes, please describe.)

Own Values and Philosophy

10. What are your own beliefs about the purposes of education?
11. What do you think are the most important things for students to learn in school?

School Values & Philosophy

12. What is your understanding of what your school really values? What really matters in this school?
13. How have these values been developed?
14. How are these values reflected in what happens in this school?
15. How would you describe the culture of your school?

Staff Development

16. Have you had any opportunities for staff development?
    - could you describe these?
    - how have they helped you with your work?

Finale

17. What do you enjoy most about working with this school?
18. What do you enjoy least about working with this school?
19. What major challenges lie ahead for this school?
20. Where do you see this school in another 3 years time?
21. Where do you see yourself in another 3 years time?
22. Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you would like to add?

THANK YOU!

Parents' Interview

Change

1. What do you see as the most significant changes that have happened in this school over the last 3 or 4 years?
2. How did these changes come about?
3. What was their impact in the school?
4. What changes external to the school have had an impact on the school over the last 3 or 4 years?
5. What was their impact?
6. Thinking back over the past 3-4 years, are there any things you think should have been done differently? (If yes, please describe.)
7. What do you think about the way the school communicates with you? (Any improvements?)
8. What processes (opportunities and methods) are there for feedback to and from parents about their children's learning?
   - for parents to support and encourage children's learning?
   - to let parents know about how well their children are achieving?

   How well does this work?
9. What are the expectations for children's behaviour in the school? (Optional)
10. How does the school help children to meet these expectations? (Optional)
11. What is it about this school that you appreciate most as a parent?
12. What major challenges lie ahead for this school?
13. Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you would like to add?

THANK YOU!

Board of Trustees Chair Interview

1. How long have you served on this board of trustees?
2. How long have you been the Chair of this board of trustees?

Change

3. What do you see as the most significant changes that have happened in this school over the last 3 or 4 years?
    - changes in people
    - changes in ways of doing things
4. How did these changes come about?
5. What was their impact in the school?
    - impact on teaching staff
    - impact on organisation
    - impact on students
    - impact on board
    - impact on environment
6. What major achievements have there been in the past 3-4 years?
7. What major challenges have there been in the past 3-4 years?
8. What changes external to the school have had an impact on the school over the last 3 or 4 years?
9. What was their impact?
    - on board of trustees
    - on the work of the school
    - on families, children etc.
10. Thinking back over the past 3-4 years, if you could have your time over again are there any things you would do differently? (If yes, please describe.)

The role of the board of trustees

11. How do you understand the role of the Board of trustees?
12. What is the process for developing the strategic goals of the school?
13. How do you go about formulating policy?
14. What information do you get from the school to help you with formulating strategic goals and policy?
15. How would you describe your working relationship with the principal?

Values

16. What are your own beliefs about the purposes of education?
17. What do you think are the most important things for students to learn in school?
18. What is your understanding of what this school really values? What really matters in this school?
19. How have these values been developed?
20. How are these values reflected in what happens in this school? (give an example)

Review

21. What information do you get about teaching and learning in this school?
    - is it enough?
22. What was your Board's involvement in your last ERO visit?
23. Do you consider that the ERO report assisted the Board to more effectively govern the school?
24. What role does the board of trustees play in the school's self-review?

Finale

Finally -

25. What do you enjoy most about working with this school?
26. What do you enjoy least about working with this school?
27. What major challenges lie ahead for this school?
28. Where do you see this school in another 3 years time?
29. Where do you see yourself in another 3 years time?
30. Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you would like to add?

THANK YOU!

Year 4 Student Questionnaire

ME AND MY SCHOOL

Please tell us what you feel about school
We want to hear your **own** feelings.
No-one from your school will see what you write.

Please tick the box that is most like **your own** feelings.

Tick only one box on each line

ME AND MY SCHOOL - YEAR FOUR STUDENTS

		☺ mostly	😐 sometimes	☹ hardly ever/ never
1.	I like my school	☐	☐	☐
2.	My teacher is kind to me	☐	☐	☐
3.	I like my work	☐	☐	☐
4.	My teacher helps me to do better work	☐	☐	☐
5.	I try hard at school	☐	☐	☐
6.	My teacher tells me when I do good work	☐	☐	☐
7.	I feel safe in the playground	☐	☐	☐
8.	My teacher is fair to me	☐	☐	☐

		☺ mostly	😐 sometimes	☹ hardly ever never
9.	Children in my class behave well	☐	☐	☐
10.	I belong in this school	☐	☐	☐

11. This is what I like best in my school:

___

___

12. This is what I would like to change in my school:

___

___

THANK YOU.

ME AND MY SCHOOL

Final Year Student Questionnaire

Please tell us what you think about school.
We want to hear your **own** views.
No-one from your school will see what you write.

Please tick the box that is most like your own views.
Put only one tick on each line.

Try this one:

School is a place where I watch TV:

a) ☐ usually b) ☐ sometimes c) ☐ hardly ever/never

1. **School is a place where:**

ever

	a) usually	b) sometimes	c) never/ hardly
(a) I do interesting things	a) ☐	b) ☐	c) ☐
(b) Teachers help me to improve my work	a) ☐	b) ☐	c) ☐
(c) I can learn what I need for my future	a) ☐	b) ☐	c) ☐
(d) I feel lonely	a) ☐	b) ☐	c) ☐
(e) Teachers treat me fairly	a) ☐	b) ☐	c) ☐
(f) I like my teachers	a) ☐	b) ☐	c) ☐
(g) I keep out of trouble	a) ☐	b) ☐	c) ☐
(h) Students behave well in my class	a) ☐	b) ☐	c) ☐
(i) My teacher tells me when I do good work	a) ☐	b) ☐	c) ☐
(j) I get a hard time	a) ☐	b) ☐	c) ☐
(k) I could do better work if I tried	a) ☐	b) ☐	c) ☐
(l) Teachers listen to what I say	a) ☐	b) ☐	c) ☐
(m) I get bored	a) ☐	b) ☐	c) ☐
(n) The rules are fair	a) ☐	b) ☐	c) ☐

		a) usually	b) sometimes	c) never/ hardly ever
(o)	I feel safe in the playground	a) ☐	b) ☐	c) ☐
(p)	I have good friends	a) ☐	b) ☐	c) ☐
(q)	I enjoy myself	a) ☐	b) ☐	c) ☐
(r)	I learn most things pretty quickly	a) ☐	b) ☐	c) ☐
(s)	Teachers explain things clearly to me	a) ☐	b) ☐	c) ☐
(t)	I get tired of trying	a) ☐	b) ☐	c) ☐
(u)	I get upset	a) ☐	b) ☐	c) ☐
(v)	I get all the help I need	a) ☐	b) ☐	c) ☐
(w)	I feel restless	a) ☐	b) ☐	c) ☐
(x)	I get bullied	a) ☐	b) ☐	c) ☐

2. What things do you like best about your school?

____

____

3. What things would you like to change about your school?

____

____

Thank you!

NZCER Sustainable School Development Project

Teacher Questionnaire

- Thanks to Quality in Education, Scotland

This questionnaire has two parts. **Part 1** asks you about your opinions on a variety of issues related to your work and school. **Part 2** asks for your opinions of changes at your school. **Part 3** asks for some background information. Please complete all sections.

PART 1

FOR EACH STATEMENT PLEASE CIRCLE ONE RESPONSE

the extent to which you agree with the statement as it reflects what is happening in your school at this time.

1 = Strongly disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Uncertain
4 = Agree
5 = Strongly agree

Example

This school now

1 2 3 [✓ 4] 5 The principal knows most of the students in this school by name

Part 1

This school now					
1	2	3	4	5	1. There is effective communication among teachers
1	2	3	4	5	2. Teachers regularly discuss ways of improving students' learning
1	2	3	4	5	3. Decision-making processes are fair
1	2	3	4	5	4. Teachers encourage students to be independent learners
1	2	3	4	5	5. Students respect teachers
1	2	3	4	5	6. The school allows staff joint planning time
1	2	3	4	5	7. Staff ensure that students receive constructive feedback about their work
1	2	3	4	5	8. Staff in this school work hard to promote and maintain good relations with the community
1	2	3	4	5	9. Senior staff are available to discuss curriculum/teaching matters
1	2	3	4	5	10. Teachers respect students
1	2	3	4	5	11. Staff encourage students to try their very best
1	2	3	4	5	12. New staff are well supported in this school
1	2	3	4	5	13. Teachers believe that all children can be successful
1	2	3	4	5	14. Whole-school meetings are worthwhile
1	2	3	4	5	15. There is mutual respect between staff and senior staff in this school
1	2	3	4	5	16. Staff feel encouraged to bring forward new ideas
1	2	3	4	5	17. Expectations about school work are communicated clearly to all students
1	2	3	4	5	18. Teachers regularly collaborate to plan their teaching
1	2	3	4	5	19. Teachers have a say in topics selected for the school's staff development programme
1	2	3	4	5	20. Teachers regularly monitor the learning and progress of individual students
1	2	3	4	5	21. Teachers regularly observe each other in the classroom and give each other feedback
1	2	3	4	5	22. There is effective communication between senior staff and teachers
1	2	3	4	5	23. The primary concern of everyone in the school is student learning
1	2	3	4	5	24. Staff participate in important decision making
1	2	3	4	5	25. The senior staff communicate a clear vision of where the school is going

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1 2 3 4 5	26. Staff development time is used effectively in the school
1 2 3 4 5	27. Parents are clear about behaviour standards expected in school
1 2 3 4 5	28. If staff have a problem with their teaching they usually turn to colleagues for help
1 2 3 4 5	29. Every attempt is made to set challenging standards of achievement for each student.
1 2 3 4 5	30. Students in this school are enthusiastic about learning.
1 2 3 4 5	31. Teachers like working in this school.
1 2 3 4 5	32. Staff have a commitment to the whole school and not just their class or syndicate.
1 2 3 4 5	33. Teachers pay attention to keeping the school environment attractive.
1 2 3 4 5	34. The school communicates clearly to parents the standard of work it expects from students.
1 2 3 4 5	35. Teachers have a say in the school strategic plan.
1 2 3 4 5	36. Teachers in this school believe that all students can be successful.
1 2 3 4 5	37. At staff meetings time is spent on important things rather than on minor issues.
1 2 3 4 5	38. Adults (teachers) as well as students learn in this school.
1 2 3 4 5	39. Non-teaching staff feel involved in the life of the school.
1 2 3 4 5	40. There is regular staff discussion about how to achieve school goals/targets.
1 2 3 4 5	41. Standards set for students are consistently upheld across the school.

This school now	
1 2 3 4 5	42. Teachers share similar beliefs and attitudes about effective teaching/learning.
1 2 3 4 5	43. Senior staff openly recognise teachers when they do things well.
1 2 3 4 5	44. Teachers in this school believe that all students can learn.
1 2 3 4 5	45. Students work is prominently displayed.
1 2 3 4 5	46. Students have some say in the school strategic plan.
1 2 3 4 5	47. Student success is regularly celebrated in this school.
1 2 3 4 5	48. Non-teaching staff have input into the school strategic plan.
1 2 3 4 5	49. Disruption in classes is dealt with promptly so that learning for all students can proceed.
1 2 3 4 5	50. The staff encourage parents to be involved in the school.
1 2 3 4 5	51. Students are clear about standards of behaviour expected in the school.
1 2 3 4 5	52. The school development plan includes practical ways of evaluating success in achieving goals and targets.
1 2 3 4 5	53. Extra-curricular activities provide valuable opportunities for all students.
1 2 3 4 5	54. The Board of Trustees plays a significant role in supporting developments within the school.

Part 2
CHANGE OVER THE LAST 3-4 YEARS

Please circle one response
(use 1-5 scale, and don't know) 1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree

1	2	3	4	5	Don't know	1. We expect more of our students
1	2	3	4	5	Don't know	2. We enjoy our work more
1	2	3	4	5	Don't know	3. We have made positive changes to the way we teach
1	2	3	4	5	Don't know	4. Student behaviour has improved
1	2	3	4	5	Don't know	5. We have made positive changes to the way the school runs
1	2	3	4	5	Don't know	6. We have more professional development
1	2	3	4	5	Don't know	7. We have more contact with other schools
1	2	3	4	5	Don't know	8. We have made positive changes to how we plan ahead
1	2	3	4	5	Don't know	9. We monitor our progress more
1	2	3	4	5	Don't know	10. Parents show more interest in their children's learning
1	2	3	4	5	Don't know	11. We acknowledge children's cultures more
1	2	3	4	5	Don't know	12. We make more use of te reo Maori

13. What do you see as the achievements of this school over the last 3-4 years?

14. What do you see as the current strengths of this school?

15. What changes would you like to see in this school over the next couple of years, if any?

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Part 3

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

(PLEASE TICK OR FILL IN THE APPROPRIATE BOXES)

1. ☐ Female
☐ Male

2. Name of your School:
____

3. Years of teaching experience
☐ less than two
☐ 2 – 4 years
☐ 5 –10 years
☐ 11 – 20 years
☐ 21+ years

4. Years at this school
☐ less than two
☐ 2 – 4 years
☐ 5 –10 years
☐ 11 – 20 years
☐ 21+ years

5. Position and responsibility
☐ Class teacher
☐ Senior teacher
☐ AP/DP

☐ Principal
☐ Specialist teacher
☐ Part-time teacher
Other – please specify ____________________

6. Qualifications (please specify)
____
____
____

7. Membership of professional organisations (name)
____
____
____

Support Staff Questionnaire

This questionnaire has three parts. **Part 1** asks you about your opinions on a variety of issues related to your work and school. **Part 2** asks for your opinions of changes at your school. **Part 3** asks for some background information. Please complete all sections.

PART 1

FOR EACH STATEMENT PLEASE CIRCLE ONE RESPONSE

the extent to which you agree with the statement as it reflects what is happening in your school at this time.

1 = Strongly disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Uncertain
4 = Agree
5 = Strongly agree

Example

This school now	
1 2 3 [✓ 4] 5	The principal knows most of the students in this school by name

Part 1

This school now	
1 2 3 4 5	1. There is effective communication among staff
1 2 3 4 5	2. Decision-making processes are fair
1 2 3 4 5	3. Students respect staff
1 2 3 4 5	4. Staff in this school work hard to promote and maintain good relations with the community
1 2 3 4 5	5. Teachers respect students
1 2 3 4 5	6. Staff encourage students to try their very best
1 2 3 4 5	7. New staff are well supported in this school
1 2 3 4 5	8. Teachers believe that all children can be successful
1 2 3 4 5	9. Whole-school meetings are worthwhile
1 2 3 4 5	10. There is mutual respect between staff and senior staff in this school
1 2 3 4 5	11. Staff feel encouraged to bring forward new ideas
1 2 3 4 5	12. There is effective communication between teachers and support staff
1 2 3 4 5	13. The primary concern of everyone in the school is student learning
1 2 3 4 5	14. Staff participate in important decision making
1 2 3 4 5	15. The senior staff communicate a clear vision of where the school is going
1 2 3 4 5	16. Staff development time is used effectively in the school
1 2 3 4 5	17. Parents are clear about behaviour standards expected in school
1 2 3 4 5	18. Students in this school are enthusiastic about learning
1 2 3 4 5	19. Support staff like working in this school
1 2 3 4 5	20. Staff have a commitment to the whole school and not just their class or syndicate
1 2 3 4 5	21. Staff pay attention to keeping the school environment attractive

This school now	
1 2 3 4 5	22. The school communicates clearly to parents the standard of work it expects from students.
1 2 3 4 5	23. Teachers in this school believe that all students can be successful.
1 2 3 4 5	24. At staff meetings time is spent on important things rather than on minor issues.
1 2 3 4 5	25. Adults as well as students learn in this school.
1 2 3 4 5	26. Support staff feel involved in the life of the school.
1 2 3 4 5	27. There is regular staff discussion about how to achieve school goals/targets.
1 2 3 4 5	28. Standards set for students are consistently upheld across the school.
1 2 3 4 5	29. Senior staff openly recognise support staff when they do things well.
1 2 3 4 5	30. Students work is prominently displayed.
1 2 3 4 5	31. Student success is regularly celebrated in this school.
1 2 3 4 5	32. Support staff have input into the school strategic plan.
1 2 3 4 5	33. Disruption in classes is dealt with promptly so that learning for all students can proceed.
1 2 3 4 5	34. The staff encourage parents to be involved in the school.
1 2 3 4 5	35. Students are clear about standards of behaviour expected in the school.
1 2 3 4 5	36. The school development plan includes practical ways of evaluating success in achieving goals and targets.
1 2 3 4 5	37. Extra-curricular activities provide valuable opportunities for all students.
1 2 3 4 5	38. The Board of Trustees plays a significant role in supporting developments within the school.
1 2 3 4 5	39. Teachers in this school believe that all students can learn.

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Part 2
CHANGE OVER THE LAST 1-2 YEARS

Please circle one response
(use 1-5 scale, and don't know) 1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree

1	2	3	4	5	Don't know	1. We expect more of our students
1	2	3	4	5	Don't know	2. We enjoy our work more
1	2	3	4	5	Don't know	3. We have made positive changes to the way we teach
1	2	3	4	5	Don't know	4. Student behaviour has improved
1	2	3	4	5	Don't know	5. We have made positive changes to the way the school runs
1	2	3	4	5	Don't know	6. We have more professional development
1	2	3	4	5	Don't know	7. We have more contact with other schools
1	2	3	4	5	Don't know	8. We have made positive changes to how we plan ahead
1	2	3	4	5	Don't know	9. We monitor our progress more
1	2	3	4	5	Don't know	10. Parents show more interest in their children's learning
1	2	3	4	5	Don't know	11. We acknowledge children's cultures more
1	2	3	4	5	Don't know	12. We make more use of te reo Maori

13. What do you see as the achievements of this school over the last 3-4 years?

14. What do you see as the current strengths of this school?

15. What changes would you like to see in this school over the next couple of years, if any?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

(PLEASE TICK OR FILL IN THE APPROPRIATE BOXES)

1. ☐ **Female**
☐ **Male**

2. Name of your School:
____

3. Years at this school
☐ **less than two**
☐ **2 – 4 years**
☐ **5 –10 years**
☐ **11 – 20 years**
☐ **21+ years**

4. Position and responsibility
☐ **Teacher aide**
☐ **Deputy Librarian**
☐ **Office Manager**
☐ **Office Assistant**
☐ **Caretaker/Cleaner**
Other – please specify
____

5. Qualifications (please specify)
____
____
____

6. Membership of professional organisations (name)
____
____
____

APPENDIX 4
Consent Form

Sustainable school improvement research project

Consent form

- I have read the quotations drawn from an interview with me in the draft report *Sector and official views of school improvement in New Zealand.*
- I agree to my name being attributed to the quotations from my interview.
- I agree to being listed in an appendix to the report as a participant in the research.
- My signature below indicates that I have read and understood this consent form and I have agreed to my name being used as outlined.

Name ____

Signature ____

Position (at time of interview) ________________________________

Date ______________________

Please return in the addressed envelope to Linda Mitchell, NZCER, PO Box 3237, Wellington by **20 September.**

APPENDIX 4

INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM FOR CASE STUDY SCHOOLS

SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

INFORMATION SHEET

This research investigates how schools that have been identified as "improving" continue to develop so that the quality of children's learning continues to grow over time. We want to find out the factors in schools and their communities which encourage school learning, change and improvement, as well as the factors that make this more difficult.

In the first part of the study, we interviewed key people in educational agencies and organisations to see what they understood as sustainable school improvement. Our intention was to build up a picture of what school improvement and development looks like at the policy level, to people in national educational organisations, and to people who work in schools.

In this second part of the study, we are undertaking case-studies of 10 primary and intermediate schools which have been named by people in the first part of the study as ones which are engaged in notable school developments.

The study will involve the researchers in documenting the history of school change and improvement in this school, and in tracking current and future practices. This will include a short written survey for all staff, and interviews with the principal, teachers from different parts of the school, the chair of the board of trustees, and students from different parts of the school. We would also like to attend any staff meetings that occur during our 2-3 day visit, and observe some classrooms and playground activity. (At some time in the future we would hope to return to track further changes).

The intention of this research is that participants will benefit as well as the researchers. It will be an opportunity for you to give an account of your own achievements, challenges and future plans. In the process of the discussions and data collection it is hoped that participants will gain insights into school development processes, and get feedback on their own achievements. The researchers are also prepared to be a source of information for the school in areas where the school requests this.

All material will be treated confidentially, with schools and individuals identified only if they wish. The draft case studies will be given to schools for your feedback before the final report is written. Each of the 10 schools involved will receive a copy of the final report, and summaries of the findings.

The NZCER team for this study are Marie Cameron and Linda Mitchell, with support from Cathy Wylie.

If you would like further information on the study, please contact one of us:

Marie Cameron - 04 384 7939(ext.818), marie.cameron@nzcer.org.nz
Linda Mitchell: 04 802 1443, linda.mitchell@nzcer.org.nz
NZCER fax is (04) 3847 933

SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT RESEARCH PROJECT

FORM FOR CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY

I have read the information about the sustainable school improvement research study. I understand that my name will be kept confidential in the report on the study.

I agree to take part in the study.

Name:____

Signature:__________________________________

Date: ________________________

Freepost no. 3214
Linda Mitchell
Senior Researcher
NZCER
P.O.Box 3237
Wellington 6000

APPENDIX 5

NAMES AND ORGANISATIONS OF SCHOOL SECTOR PERSONNEL AT MARCH 2001

Principals

John	Fleming	Principal	Pt Chevalier School
Peter	Gunn	Principal	Naenae Intermediate School
Marilyn	Gwilliam	Principal	Epsom Normal School
Judy	Hanna	Principal	Mangere Bridge School

Organisation Representatives

Bruce	Adin	Vice President	NZEI Te Riu Roa
Chris	France	President	New Zealand School Trustees Association
Elaine	Hines	National Training Co-ordinator	New Zealand School Trustees Association
Michael	Irwin	Policy Analyst	NZ Business Roundtable
Geoff	Lovegrove	President	New Zealand Principals Federation
Pat	Lynch	Chief Executive Officer	Association of Proprietors of Integrated Schools
Carol	Parker	Regional Secretary	NZEI Te Riu Roa
Darrell	Ward	Immediate Past President	NZEI Te Riu Roa

Government Officials

Lyn	Bareta	Project Director Literacy Leadership	Learning Media
Jacky	Burgon	Research Manager	Ministry of Education
Martin	Connelly	Chief Policy Analyst	Ministry of Education
Jim	Douglas	Manager Schools & Early Childhood	Central South Ministry of Education
Mike	Hollings	General Manager	Māori Development Policy Te Puni Kokiri
Glenda	Irving	Policy Analyst	The Treasury
John	Langley	Director	Teacher Registration Board

Graeme	Marshall	Regional Manager	Ministry of Education
Fiona	Ross	Policy Analyst	The Treasury
Mary	Sinclair	Senior Manager	Monitoring and Support, Ministry of Education
Warwick	Terry	Policy Analyst	The Treasury
Researchers/Academics			
Phil	Capper	Director	Centre for Research on Work, Education and Business Ltd
Lester	Flockton	Co-Director	Educational Assessment Research Unit, University of Otago
Wally	Penetito	Senior Lecturer	School of Education, Victoria University of Wellington
Viviane	Robinson	Associate Professor	University of Auckland
Teacher Educators/Researchers			
Murray	Gadd	Education Consultant	
Kay	Hawke	Education Consultant	Institute for Professional Development and Educational Research, Massey University
Jan	Hill	Education Consultant	Institute for Professional Development and Educational Research, Massey University
Mary	Hill	Senior Lecturer	University of Waikato
David	Stewart	Director	New Zealand Principals and Leadership Centre

APPENDIX 6

SCHOOL SECTOR PERSONNEL INTERVIEWS

Questions for Interviews

1. What do you understand by the term “school improvement?”
2. What would you expect to see in a school that is improving?
3. What needs to occur for schools to sustain improvement over time?
4. What are the major obstacles to school improvement?
5. How can schools build on improvement when they are already acknowledged as successful?
6. Describe any tensions between school improvement and external factors, e.g. accountabilities, expectations and requirements.
7. What three things do you think would make the greatest difference to school improvement?

APPENDIX 7

LETTER AND CONSENT FORM FOR SCHOOL SECTOR PERSONNEL

11 September 2002

«First_Name» «Last_Name»
«Company»
«Address_1»
«Address_2»
«Address_3»
«City»

Dear «First_Name»

Last year we interviewed you, as well as other experienced school sector personnel, about your views of school improvement for our sustainable school improvement research project. We decided not to publish the report of views of school improvement as a separate report, but rather publish it together with a report of changes and processes of change that have occurred in ten primary schools over the last few years. Our final report is almost complete, and we hope to launch it at NZCER's *Teachers make a difference* conference on 25 October.

The provisional title is **Sustaining school improvement – ten primary school's journeys.**

When we interviewed you, we undertook to send you a draft of the report, so that you could consider whether we could put your name to quotations from your interview. We would need your agreement to do this. I am enclosing this draft and have highlighted quotations that we drew from your interview. Would you please fill in and send me the attached consent form by 20 September, to indicate if you agree to be named. I would also like to list you in an appendix to the report as a participant, so please would you advise me of your position within your workplace at the time of the interview (March–June, 2001).

Please contact me if you would like to discuss this request. My direct phone line is (04) 802 1443, email linda.mitchell@nzcer.org.nz

Regards

Linda Mitchell
Senior researcher

CONSENT FORM FOR SECTOR PERSONNEL

Sustainable school improvement research project

Consent form

- I have read the quotations drawn from an interview with me in the draft report *Sector and official views of school improvement in New Zealand.*
- I agree to my name being attributed to the quotations from my interview.
- I agree to being listed in an appendix to the report as a participant in the research.
- My signature below indicates that I have read and understood this consent form and I have agreed to my name being used as outlined.

Name ____

Signature ____

Position (at time of interview) ______________________________

Date _______________________

Please return in the addressed envelope to Linda Mitchell, NZCER, PO Box 3237, Wellington by **20 September.**

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

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